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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' SELF-  
BELIEFS AND BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHERS AND ACADEMIC  
OUTCOMES AND DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS

by

James Matthew Thompson

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2008

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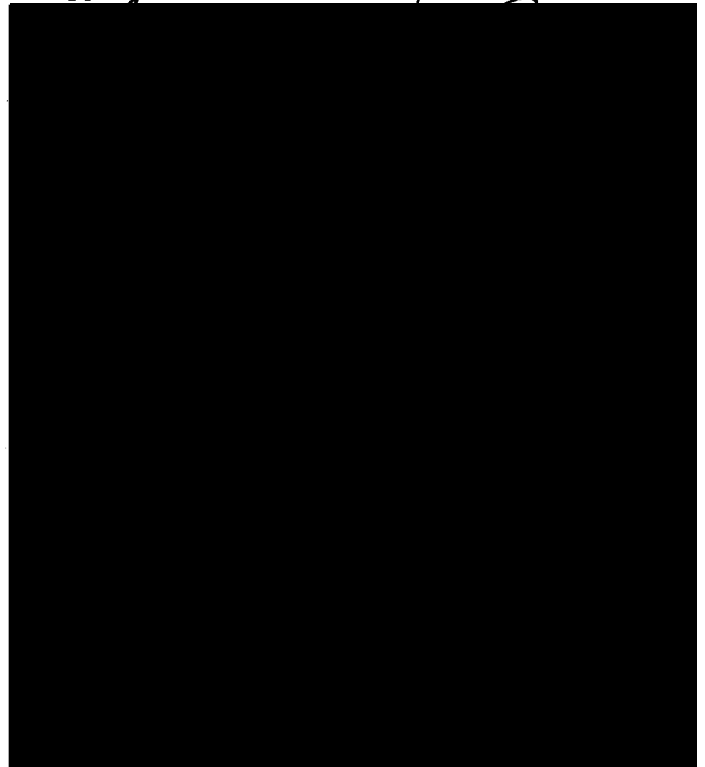
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## ABSTRACT

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' SELF-BELIEFS AND BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHERS AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AND DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS

by James Matthew Thompson

December 2008

This research study addressed a facet of the academic achievement gap regarding students' beliefs. The specific area that was examined is African American students' self-beliefs and beliefs about their teachers, while Caucasian students were used as a comparative group. The sample consisted of 34 African American and 65 Caucasian fifth grade students from a southeastern public school district. The purpose of the study was to explore correlations between beliefs and African American students' academic outcomes. The theoretical foundations regarding beliefs, cultural context, and stereotype threat that were explored in this study addressed the variables located in Chapter III: Methodology. Additionally, these elements were also discussed within the literature review. The researcher specifically designed an instrument to test variables. Correlational analyses were conducted to determine whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers have a relationship with composite report card grades and discipline referrals. Three subscales: students' self beliefs, students' positive beliefs toward their teachers, and students' negative beliefs toward their teachers were evaluated and yielded an acceptable reliability index with Cronbach's alpha greater than .70 for both pilot and research samples.

The researcher found no statistically significant difference between African American and Caucasian students regarding the academic and discipline gaps due to the low variability between the two groups of students. African American students performed comparably to Caucasian students in the four core subjects without evidence of a significant academic achievement gap. Additionally, there was no evidence to support a discipline gap between African American and Caucasian students. The findings further indicated there were statistically significant correlations between African American students' (1) self-beliefs and discipline referrals, and (2) positive beliefs about their teachers and discipline referrals. Furthermore, there were statistically significant correlations between Caucasian students' (1) negative beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades, and (2) self-beliefs and discipline referrals.

## DEDICATION

On behalf of my wonderful father, Mr. Montague M. Thompson, Jr., and mother, Mrs. Sudjai Thompson, I dedicate this manuscript to the two of you for always being there and helping me to realize that there is nothing too big for my God. Thank you Lord for blessing me with the most supportive and awesome parents in the whole wide world!

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“...But with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). This work has definitely been a humbling and blessed experience made possible with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His wonderful support system.

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In life, God places different people into our lives for various reasons and in various seasons. Hence, I would like to thank Dr. Paul McKenzie for your many words of wisdom, guidance, and support throughout the entire dissertation journey. You were a tremendous help in the data collection process. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues, friends, and associates in South Carolina.

Dad, you and I made it! I would like to thank you for staying up with me many late nights just to listen to my research study. You were always there to encourage and motivate me to never give up, even when the light at the end of the tunnel appeared to be light years away. Whenever I was in a slump, I knew I could always count on you to get me out of it. Dad, you have so many great qualities and characteristics that make you very special. I pray that if I can do a small fraction of what you have done for your



family, then I know without a shadow of a doubt that I would one day become a great husband and father.

Mom, you have been so instrumental in my life ever since you brought me into this world. Behind every great son is a great mother who would go above and beyond to ensure her son would be successful in every endeavor that he sets out to accomplish.

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Last but not least, thank you God for allowing me to see it through.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The overarching theme of this research study was to determine whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers were related to academic outcomes such as composite report card grades. There was an analysis of significant relationships to determine whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers were related to discipline referrals and referrals to special education services. The purpose of Chapter I is to introduce the research study. This chapter contains the problem statement, background of the problem, and a brief overview of the methodology, which contained the research questions and hypotheses that guided this study. Additionally, this chapter provides definitions of terms, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and a justification to conduct this research study.

The academic achievement gap is a broad category; therefore, this study examines African American students' beliefs about their teachers in a rural school district located in a southeastern state. This research study will identify some key factors that should help teachers to gain a better understanding of the African American students whom they teach and with whom they come in contact with on a daily basis. Whitehead (2006) emphasized that teachers' beliefs about students have been examined to a greater degree than students' beliefs about teachers in attempts to explain academic and discipline gaps. In this research study, African American students were the primary focus. African American students were asked to give their beliefs regarding academic achievement, discipline referrals, and referrals to special education services.

The study indirectly addressed other long-term negative social factors that impact society. While African American men make up nearly 12% of the entire United States population, they comprise 41% of approximately two million men who are incarcerated (US Department of Justice, 2007). A more horrific statistic is the fact that African American men between the ages of 20 to 29 account for 15.5% of men that are incarcerated (US Department of Justice, 2007). Of the African American men who are incarcerated, many have not completed high school; they have dropped out or have been expelled from school for various reasons. When African American male students drop out of school because they believe teachers do not care or they do not feel welcome in the classrooms (Casteel, 2000), then it is highly likely that it could lead to additional negative results. Tidwell (1989) stated “the costs of dropping out include difficulty in finding employment, being relegated to a low-paying job, and having less opportunity for economic advancement than high school graduates” (p. 155). Thus, this issue should not only be addressed to help narrow the academic achievement and discipline gaps, researching the topic can also help to improve social class and economic factors. This is not a problem that is confined within a single race or ethnic group; rather, this is a problem that affects all people regardless of social class within the United States. The key findings of this research study may help to prepare teachers and school administrators working with African American students.

### Background

Previous research on the issues of the relationships of African American students’ beliefs about their teachers to the teachers’ beliefs about African American students has been explored primarily in urban school settings. The focus of prior studies has generally

focused upon African American students' beliefs about their Caucasian teachers and of each other. Furthermore, these studies have not analyzed African American students' beliefs about their teachers regardless of ethnicity. The history of integration in public schools provides perspectives on these issues.

The period of the 1950s is most noted for the 1954 *Brown v. The Board of Education*, which involved five individual lawsuits that argued equal protection under the laws guaranteed by Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment (Kluger, 1976; Stephan, 1980). As a result of the lawsuits, the Supreme Court justices stated:

Today, it [education] is a principal instrument in awaking the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (Rist, 1979, p. 3)

The first of five cases that challenged the segregated public school system was filed against Clarendon County, South Carolina in the 1947 *Briggs v. Elliott* (Gamber, 2004; Kluger, 1976; Stephan, 1980). During the trial, a psychologist testified regarding his experimental tests in which he asked a sample of African American students in segregated schools in the South and another sample of African American students in integrated schools in the North which dolls, whether they would prefer to play with either a Black or White doll (Kluger, 1976; Stephan, 1980). According to the report, the results demonstrated that 67% of African American students who attended the segregated



schools had a stronger desire to play with the White doll, while 59% of the students reported this doll to be nice. Furthermore, 59% of the students stated that the Black doll appeared to be bad. In the integrated schools, the African American students reported having selected the White doll more frequently as their choice compared to the Black doll (Stephan, 1980). The African American students in the integrated schools were asked which doll they resembled and 33% reported looking like the White doll. On the other hand, the numbers were slightly higher for African American students in the integrated schools. The psychologist concluded African American students in the segregated schools were less likely to reject their race than the African American students in the integrated schools. Stephan stated that “the self-esteem of Blacks is low in segregated schools and that segregation leads Black children to be prejudiced toward Whites” (p. 12). Hence, integrating public schools would aid African Americans in accepting Caucasians and to eradicate their prejudices. Additionally, it would help to increase the academic achievement of African American students since they were performing at considerably lower level than Caucasian students (Stephan, 1980). Upon rendering the decision for *Brown*, Chief Justice Earl Warren quoted:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of the child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the

benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system. (Kluger, 1976, p. 424)

Although the court ruled in favor of integrating public schools, it took nearly a decade for major changes to occur. Rist (1979) approximated that “1% of all black children in the 11 southern states attended desegregated schools” (p. 4) after the court ruling and prior to mid-1960s.

The 1960s was characterized by one of the most important pieces of legislation that was passed for African Americans, which was the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Rist, 1979; Stephan, 1980; Glazer, 1999). Title VI of the Act did not permit discrimination in education and deterred public schools from allowing segregation to occur by threatening to withhold public funding (Rist, 1979; Stephan, 1980). Initially, schools were not concerned regarding the threat of losing public funding because they were not receiving a considerable amount of funding from the federal government. It became a concern with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which increased the amount of federal funding allocated to public schools.

Despite the vast number of schools in the 1970s transitioning from segregation to integration, the issue of the academic achievement gap was not going to instantaneously demonstrate improvement. “In 1971, the average African American seventeen-year-old could read no better than the typical white child of eleven” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom, the gap in science was 4.7 years in 1970 and the gap was 4.3 years in mathematics in 1973. The academic achievement gap had narrowed somewhat by the late 1980s. In their senior year of high school, African American students were lagging slightly behind Caucasian students at 2.1 years in

writing proficiency and 2.5 years in reading and mathematics (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). In spite of these gains, it was not long until the academic achievement gap would once again widen. “Between 1988 and 1994, the racial gap in reading grew from 2.5 to 3.9 years; between 1990 and 1994, the racial gap in math increased from 2.5 to 3.4 years. In both science and writing, the racial gap had widened by a full year” (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999, p. 38). There were concerned individuals seeking explanations to determine the root of cause for the immediate change from positive to negative. During the period in which the academic achievement gap was beginning to decrease, there was an increase in the number of middle class African American families and the poverty rate was lower. Even when the gap began to widen, the economy did not shift drastically to affect the number of middle class African Americans nor was there a large increase of African American families in poverty (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). The authors also stated that the increase of African American children being born out-of-wedlock and living in a single parent home does not explain the negative progress of the academic achievement gap (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). Thernstrom and Thernstrom postulated the following: (1) there was an increase of violent behaviors through gang wars and the introduction of crack-cocaine during the mid-1980s; (2) students are affected by the events that occur in their communities and neighborhoods; and (3) teachers allowed African American students to focus their attention on self-interest opposed to learning curricula.

Currently, academic achievement and discipline gaps continue to plague African American students. Hull’s (2005) study on closing the academic achievement gap emphasized, “From the late 1980s to the present the achievement gap between the

minorities and Caucasians has widened or remained stagnant” (p. 9). KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, and Provasnik’s (2007) research study analyzed the status and trends in educational attainment among students in America’s public schools. In 2004, the average reading scale scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were lower for African American students than Caucasian students at 26 points for 9 year-olds, 22 points for 13 year-olds, and 29 points for 17 year-olds. More African American students scored lower on NAEP reading achievement levels at the 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Likewise, the average math scores were lower for African American students than Caucasian students at 23 points for 9 year-olds, 26 points for 13 year-olds, and 28 points for 17 year-olds (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Based on NAEP scores, the achievement gap widened as students advanced from elementary to secondary education. African American students, 22.6% of males and 12% of females, were more likely to be retained at grade level (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Additionally, the academic achievement gap was also evident in school dropouts with 10.4% of African Americans compared to 6% of Caucasians (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

The trend of the discipline gap demonstrated similar findings. In 2003, it was reported that African American students in elementary and secondary schools received a disproportionately higher suspension rate than Caucasian students (KewalRamani et al., 2007). African American males accounted for 24.2% of suspensions and African American females accounted for 15.2% of suspensions. Likewise for expulsions, African American males accounted for 6.7% and African American females accounted for 3.3% (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

Ford's (1991) findings indicated African American students' beliefs about their teachers have an impact on their academic achievement. The researcher conducted a descriptive and exploratory research study to examine African American students' attitudes and beliefs regarding academic achievement. Based on African American students' beliefs about their teachers, they "avoided increased efforts because their teacher feedback did not appear to encourage it" (Ford, 1991, p. 217). Ford emphasized that teachers' low expectations for African American students' resulted in underachievement.

Furthermore, previous studies provided key insights regarding teachers' beliefs about African American students' academic achievement. Kelly (2006) conducted a qualitative research study on teachers' beliefs about the academic achievement gap involving six Caucasians teachers. The findings indicated teachers' beliefs regarding African American students' poor academic achievement was not attributed to instructional strategies; rather it was due to external factors such as parents and community (Kelly, 2006). Kelly summarized the beliefs regarding teachers' interactions with African American students as, "teachers expressed that their particular beliefs about the factors most influencing the gap did effect the interactions they had with students in need, particularly Black students" (p. 119). Yarrell-Harris (2003) also conducted a qualitative research study regarding teachers' beliefs about African American students. The participants were four African American teachers and four Caucasian teachers. Based on the researcher's classroom observations and responses to the interviews, findings indicated "discipline was quite a problem in all the classrooms" (Yarrell-Harris, 2003, p. 127). Additionally, findings indicated a correlation between teachers' beliefs

about their students based on cultural differences and similarities were related to classroom issues.

### Statement of the Problem

There is a significant difference between the academic success and matriculation through K-12 public schools between African American students and other racial groups of students. Although many African American students lag behind other racial groups of students in academics, African American students receive a disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals and referrals to special education services. African American students are likely to drop out of school due to “low grades and low test scores, low self-esteem and very little sense of control over life situations, disciplinary problems and parents not keeping up with what the student is doing” (Crawford, 2002, p. 3). It is essential to conduct an in depth research study to determine if the beliefs held by African American students of their teachers are affecting the academic achievement and discipline gaps.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between students’ beliefs and academic outcomes. The primary focus was an analysis of significant relationships between African American students’ beliefs about teachers and academic outcomes such as composite report card grades. There was also an analysis of significant relationships between African American students’ beliefs about teachers to discipline referrals and referrals to special education services. The research was conducted in rural elementary schools located in a southeastern state.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

An exploratory factor analysis was used to operationalize the underlying construct of “belief” after the data were collected and coded. Factor analysis is “a technique for identifying groups or clusters of variables” (Field, 2005). This statistical analysis identified structure among the dependent and independent variables.

This study will focus on the following research questions:

- (1) Is there a significant correlation between African American students’ self-beliefs and the composite report card grades they receive?
- (2) Is there a significant correlation between African American students’ beliefs about their teachers and the composite report card grades they receive?
- (3) Is there a significant correlation between African American students’ self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals they receive?
- (4) Is there a significant correlation between African American students’ beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals they receive?
- (5) Is there a significant correlation between African American students’ level of stereotype threats and the composite report card grades they receive?

This study will focus on the following hypotheses:

- (1) There is a correlation between African American students’ self-beliefs and their composite report card grades.
- (2) There is a correlation between African American students’ beliefs about their teachers and their composite report card grades.
- (3) There is a relationship between African American students’ self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals they received.

- (4) There is a relationship between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals they received.
- (5) There is a relationship between African American students' level of stereotype threats and academic achievement.

### Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used most frequently throughout the manuscript.

1. *Academic Achievement Gap* – the difference in scholastic achievement between two or more ethnic or racial groups in which one group performs at a higher level of achievement compared to another group.
2. *Discipline Gap* – the degree to which one ethnic group receives a disproportionate number of discipline referrals compared to another ethnic or racial group.
3. *Disidentification* – the degree to which an individual experiences some level of difficulty from having to relate or identify with the majority of individuals within an organization or mainstream society.
4. *Gifted and Talented (GT)* – a type of special education service some students receive after being identified based on intellectual abilities and performances that far exceed those of their classmates.
5. *Learning Disabilities (LD)* – a type of special education service for students who are identified as having a “disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do



mathematical calculations” (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, 2004).

6. *Poverty School* – a public school that has at least 51% or more of the student body that qualifies for free and/or reduced lunch.
7. *Rural School* – a school that is located in a non-metropolitan area with “fewer than 2,500 inhabitants or fewer than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile” (Herzog & Pittman, 1999, p.13).
8. *School Culture* – the rituals, symbols, and activities that are used to give a school its unique identity. The unhidden rules to which students are expected to adapt and conform.
9. *Southeastern States* – the region of the United States that includes the following southern states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee.
10. *Special Education Services* – the programs that are available for students who qualify based on teachers’ referrals for psychological evaluations or concerns due to behavioral issues.
11. *Stereotype Threat* – “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 1999, p. 46).

#### Delimitations

This study had the following delimitations:

1. Only one rural, public school district that is located in South Carolina will be included in this research study.

2. Only fifth graders will be selected as participants in this research study.

#### Limitations

The research anticipated the following limitations:

1. Students may be reluctant to express their honest feelings regarding their academic abilities and behaviors, especially if they are negative.
2. Students may be reluctant to express their true beliefs about their teachers, especially if their teachers belong to another racial or ethnic group.

#### Assumptions

The researcher had several assumptions regarding this research study. First, the researcher assumed that the students participating in this study answered each question as outlined in the survey instrument truthfully and to the best of their knowledge and ability. The researcher assumed that participants were not externally influenced when deciding which answer choices to select. Lastly, the researcher assumed that individuals participating in the study understood that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the duration of the study and afterwards.

#### Justification

The purpose of this study was to determine whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers had an effect on the academic achievement and discipline gaps. The significance of this study was that it may provide insights that would help teachers and school administrators who are responsible for the learning process of African American students located in southeastern rural schools. The designated geographical location was critical due to a significant African American student population who are educated in rural public school systems in southeastern states.

According to Ornstein and Levine (2006), “more than one-third of public-school students attend rural schools, and about one-half of school districts are rural” (p. 498). South Carolina’s public schools are comprised of over 40% African American students (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik’s, 2007). In 2002, the state was ranked 50th overall in the number of students graduating high school (Editorial Projects in Education, 2002). The particular school district examined in this research study is located in one of the poorest counties in the state comprised of 56% of African American adults lacking a high school diploma. Among the graduating class of 2005, only 15% of students graduated high school in four years and enrolled into post-secondary institutions.

The findings and conclusions that were obtained from this study may help colleges and universities to understand the importance of developing a specialized concentration and curricula that would help to prepare teacher-candidates with an interest in teaching African American students in rural school districts. Various degree programs only emphasize training educators for mainstream society (Reglin, 1995; Smith, 1999). Based on teachers’ training and preparation, they will more readily be able to meet the learning needs of their African American students (Reglin, 1995). Furthermore, when teachers are able to teach according to federal and state standards and students are able to grasp the learning concepts, it will be advantageous for the entire school community. Students gain an appreciation of the necessity of receiving a quality education, which should positively impact the academic achievement among African American students (Tidwell, 1989). If more African American students remain in class opposed to being sent to the principal’s office for what is perceived by the teacher as misconduct or misbehaving (Monroe, 2005b), administrators could refocus their attention from being

disciplinarians to more complex issues and striving toward attaining the school's vision. A shift in focus may aid in narrowing the discipline gap between African American students and other racial and ethnic groups of students (Monroe, 2005b). Furthermore, it could lead to higher teacher satisfaction, which results in higher teacher retention (Thompson, 2004). This is the likelihood that teachers would remain in the classroom and less likely to search for other careers (Thompson, 2004).

The findings of this study may also help teachers and school administrators to become more aware of specific issues among African American students in rural public schools. Despite external dilemmas that students may have and potential negative effects on their academic achievement, administrators and teachers will gain an in-depth perspective on problems plaguing African American students. Additionally, the findings would help to improve communication channels and understanding between teachers and students.

### Summary

Chapter I provided a general overview of the proposed research study. The primary focus was to determine whether or not African American students' beliefs about their teachers had an effect on the academic achievement and discipline gaps. This chapter discussed the broad context of the academic achievement gap and its background, prior history dating back to the 1950s, legal issues, and key legislation. Although the primary focus of the study was the academic achievement gap, it was also worthwhile to discuss the discipline gap and its correlations to the academic achievement gap. There were several theories that underpin the development of the research questions and hypotheses; these theories were explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The content of this chapter provided several theories that undergird this research study and an overview of African American students' beliefs about public school teachers and suggested theories to explain students becoming disengaged from school culture. The review of literature explained factors prompting African American students to believe they do not belong in school or to experience a sense of inferiority to other students. This section also describes the stereotype threat that hinders many African American students from excelling in academics, while performing exceptionally well in athletics and other co-curricular activities. In order to illuminate these phenomena, it was important for this study to address the issue from the perspective of African American students' beliefs about their teachers.

#### Theoretical Foundations

There were several variables that were examined throughout the current research study. Pertinent theories that underpinned this research were based on (1) beliefs and expectations, (2) physiological needs, (3) cultural context, and (4) stereotype threats. In the current study, the researcher extends Glenn's (1996) theory and focus on whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers affect their academic achievement and other outcomes, such as discipline referrals and referral to special services.

When teachers communicate negative messages to students regarding their abilities to succeed in the classroom, students can become disengaged from school. To

ensure an effective learning process, students' most basic needs should be satisfied. It is difficult for students to thrive in a non-conducive learning environment. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, individuals should have their most basic physiological needs satisfied to acquire a level of motivation and drive in life (Arkes & Garske, 1977; Cofer & Appley, 1964). As it applies to the classroom, teachers are expected to provide an inviting learning environment and safe haven for all students. When students' needs are not met, it leads to dysfunction and disturbances in the classroom (Arkes & Garske, 1977; Ford, 1996). Students should experience a sense of belongingness and love prior to being expected to achieve in the classroom. Crawford (2002) stated that "a child's sense of self-worth is highly related to his achievement in school and other areas" (p. 3).

Even after students' most basic needs are met and teachers have developed a conducive, learning environment for the majority of the students, there remain some students who do not perform well academically or socially. Studies demonstrated that poor academics can sometimes be attributed to cultural differences between African American students' and public schools. Within the cultural context theoretical framework, Ware (2006) asserted that students who excel academically share the same values and culture with their teachers. These students are more responsive to teachers' methods of instruction and are better able to adapt to changes. However, many African American students come to school with a cultural perspective that is contrary of what their parents, families, and community may have taught them, one that can have a detrimental effect on their academic success (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Because of their behavior and conduct, these students are often misunderstood and mislabeled. Ford (1996) stated that "bodily kinesthetic students are likely to be

(mis)labeled as ‘hyperactive’ and unjustly medicated. Male and Black students are overrepresented among those identified as hyperactive” (p. 19). Thus, these students are often ignored, received more disciplinary consequences, and are referred more often to special-education classes (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). The gap in cultural differences leads to teachers’ poor responsiveness and a reticence to meet students who are lacking the adequate academic and social skills in order to bring them to a cultural level that is deemed appropriate for the entire school. To meet students’ learning needs, teachers could incorporate within their lesson plans differentiated learning strategies that would address multiple learning styles and diverse learners (Goodwin, 1997; Reglin, 1995; Ware, 2006).

Stereotype threat is a theory that attempts to explain African American students’ lack of academic achievement skills and willingness to identify with the dominant school culture (Steele, 1998). According to this theory, some African American students view themselves as belonging to a group or race that is targeted with many negative stereotypes. Based on this perspective, these students become threatened after realizing that their beliefs can become reality. As a result, these African American students believe that they can be mistreated based on various negative stereotypes or experience some degree of discrimination (Steele, 1998). Taylor’s (2006) qualitative study on low-income African American high school students adds support to Steele’s (1998) stereotype threat theory. Taylor concluded that “teachers’ having a low expectation of an African American student’s intelligence is consistent with the tenets of stereotype threat which has been identified in the literature as being a considerable factor perpetuating the achievement gap” (p. 202). The psychological effect of stereotype threat is most

detrimental in African American students when they perceive a particular situation, such as having low intelligence, as germane to a stereotype that applies to their racial group (Steele, 1998; Taylor, 2006).

### Academic Achievement Gap

A discussion of the academic achievement gap is usually integrated into a myriad of discussions involving school accountability. An organization's existence is dependent on its effectiveness to meet its goals and objectives. In corporate America, companies are required to satisfy stakeholders, such as board of directors and investors. The goals are to increase bottom-line and increase productivity, while making a substantial profit. Investors have a strong interest in a company in which they have purchased stocks. Therefore, they expect to receive a return on their investments. Although school systems are not in operation to receive profits, they are also held to high standards through increased accountability. Ornstein and Levine (2006) defined accountability as "the notion that teachers, administrators, school board members, and even students themselves must be held responsible for the results of their efforts" (p. 237). It takes individuals' collaborative effort to ensure that all students are receiving a quality education. As corporate executives are pressured to make a profit, school superintendents and principals experience similar situations. For instance, school administrators are required to ensure that all students are meeting specific criteria and performance as established by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* (Ornstein & Levine, 2006).

As accountability is applied at the top of the school system, teachers and students also feel the pressure to demonstrate productivity (Jagers & Carroll, 2002). Similar to



investors, stakeholders want to realize that their monies are being used most effectively (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). As stakeholders, parents believe that their children should receive a quality education.

In 2001, President Bush endorsed one of the most significant articles of education legislation, *NCLB*. After many discussions and efforts to close the academic achievement gap, *NCLB* was presented to America as a means to solve the academic deficiencies among groups of minority students that were lagging behind in the classroom. Based on *NCLB*, schools must demonstrate that all children are performing at the proficient level in all core academic subjects by 2014 (Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohrnstedt, & Borman, 2008). Many school systems are faced with specific subgroups of students that generally perform lower on standardized tests compared to other students (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Regardless of ethnicity, gender, or any other characteristics, *NCLB* accepts no excuses when it comes to the academic achievement gap.

The academic achievement gap is an educational issue that is often discussed among many legislators, school administrators, teachers, community leaders, and parents. According to Rothstein (2004), "the achievement gap is only an average of the performances of all children within large social class groupings" (p. 61). Based on research studies, many theories have evolved to explain the mere existence of the achievement gap. Despite competing theories, educators blame parents for not adequately preparing their children for kindergarten. Conversely, African American parents believe that their children are prepared for kindergarten but the school system is failing to meet the students' learning needs (Phillips, Croupe, & Ralph, 1998). Furthermore, a number of psychological and educational research studies have demonstrated that disadvantaged

African American students performed at a lower level in the classroom compared to Caucasian and Asian students (Osborne, 2001; Rowley, 2004). The disadvantaged African American students received lower grades from teachers, scored much lower on standardized tests, and contributed far greater to the dropout rate.

According to Holzman's (2004) national research study on the academic achievement disparities, findings indicated African American males contributed far greater to the dropout rate compared to any other subgroups. Based on the 2001-2002 academic year, Holzman stated African American males' graduation rate was 42%, while the "dropout rate for Black males was twice that for White males" (p. 4). In 2001-2002, there were thirteen states that reported having a lower graduation rate for African American males than the national average (Holzman, 2004). Roderick's (2003) longitudinal study in Chicago reported similar findings in which 40% of African American males graduated high school compared to 80% of African American females. Between the period of April 1995 and June 1997, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 male and 17 female subjects from their eighth grade through their tenth grade years (Roderick, 2003). The research design was comprised of interviewing participants three times per academic year, collecting students' academic record, and requesting teachers to complete student assessment surveys. The researcher conducted follow-up interviews after students completed the eleventh grade and during spring 2000 (Roderick, 2003). The findings indicated that the participants' academic performance tend to decrease as they matriculated through high school. While students were in the eighth grade, one male and one female failed a class. Through the ninth grade, approximately 70% of males and 41% of females either failed at least one or more

classes or dropped out of school (Roderick, 2003). Roderick reported that 60% of males and 20% of females had dropped out of school by the twelfth grade.

There are numerous arguments that offer explanations to African American students receiving lower academic gains, such as poor academic preparation due to their parents belonging to a lower socioeconomic status; and, they are simply disengaged from learning. Based on one theory attempting to address the academic achievement gap, educators believe that African American students are not performing at grade level because they are not adequately prepared to learn. The academic achievement gap trend between African American and Caucasian students begins prior to students entering kindergarten (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Based on social class and childrearing, there are differences in means of children's preparation for an education. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are prepared and ready to enter kindergarten. Routé-Chatmon et al. (2006) stated "as a child's first teacher, parents generally have a strong influence on learning during early childhood" (p. 201). Although this may be ideal, African American students often enter public schools on an "unleveled playing field" and are constantly striving to catch up with their peers with little to no hope. Parents that are more educated or have advanced college degree(s) are more apt to begin reading to their children when they are toddlers (Rothstein, 2004). These parents tend to engage in more leisure reading and have more books available around the house for their children. Generally, parents that only have a high school education or less are less likely to read to their children (Rothstein, 2004).

In 1998, the federal government administered a national survey to a sample of parents with kindergartners (Rothstein, 2004). The project's aim was to gather

information regarding the social class and children's preparation for kindergarten.

Questions that were contained in the survey asked parents the following as it relates to: family income, parents' level of education obtained, and parents' occupation. Based on the aforementioned criteria, the federal government collectively combined the indicators to develop what is referred to as the socioeconomic status or SES. The kindergartners were then categorized into five SES quintiles. As a result, children belonging to the upper 20<sup>th</sup> percentile of SES were performing at grade level or above when they entered kindergarten, which is contributed to active parents' involvement through reading and having a large supply of books.

Although there is a gap between African American and Caucasian students' academic performances, the greater issue is finding plausible explanations to address the existence of academic achievement gap when both groups of students are reared in similar conditions and belong to the same socioeconomic class (Rothstein, 2004). Even when external or background factors remained constant, African-American students continued to perform lower than other groups of students (Steele, 1997). Furthermore, the academic achievement gap is not as extensive in the aforementioned case; therefore, it begins to diminish if factors such as family level of income, school preparation, and parents' involvement, are constant between African American and Caucasian students (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). The gap does not decrease with time, rather it continues to widen as students matriculate through high school. Thus, even when African American students are given adequate resources to succeed in the classroom, there remain unanswered questions in addressing why they continue to lag behind their counterparts.

### African American Students' Beliefs About Teachers

Although there is limited research related to African American students' beliefs and/or attitudes of their teachers, this area should be further examined due to continual underachievement (Howard, 2002). When addressing the academic achievement gap, the root of the problem involves African American students. Therefore, it may be of some value to learn of African American students' true feelings and interactions with their teachers regarding how they are treated.

Casteel (2000) conducted a quantitative study involving 160 seventh grade African American students' beliefs about treatment by Caucasian teachers in a suburban Louisiana public school. The participants were 59 boys and 101 girls who were characterized as low academic achievers and many received free or reduced lunch. There were only 12 African American students in the study who were taught only by Caucasian teachers. There were 51 teachers who participated in the study. Caucasian students consisted of 21% of the entire student body. Casteel's (2000) survey instrument contained questions that warranted students' responses in the following areas: "treatment they received from their Caucasian teachers, the ability of teachers to relate to them and their preferences of race of classroom teacher" (p. 144). The researcher reported significant findings of 62% of students believed receiving good grades and 50% of students believed receiving poor grades from Caucasian teachers were not based on their race. On the contrary, 24% of students believed that grades received from Caucasian teachers were based on their race (Casteel, 2000). When African American students were asked if Caucasian teachers disliked them based on their race, 78% of students reported favorably that teachers did not dislike them solely on race.

The researcher reported conflicting findings based on previous research regarding African American students' beliefs on being treated unfairly by teachers. Although Casteel previously reported that Caucasian teachers were not fair to seventh-grade African American students in integrated classrooms, he reported 53% of African American students "believed they were not treated wrongly by their Caucasian teachers" (Casteel, 2000, p. 144). Furthermore, 69% of students did not believe "they felt uneasy being taught by a person of a different race" (p. 145), while 25% of students believed otherwise. Casteel reported that 46% of students believed their teachers made an attempt to motivate them to learn, while 44% of students were uncertain if their teachers motivated them. Additionally to motivation, 33% of students believed their teachers did not "praise them with kind words after answering a question correctly" (p. 146), while 67% of students "felt they did not receive enough praise after trying to answer a question" (p. 146). Lastly regarding teachers' age and race, Casteel reported that 51% of African American students preferred young teachers defined by "their own judgment based on a teacher's physical appearance, use of expressions in their speech, and energy level (p. 146), while 37% of students did not have a preference in age. When students were asked "when given a choice if they would choose African American teachers" (p. 146), 43% reported with a 'no.' Although Casteel reported significant and favorable findings, this research is limited in scope and difficult to generalize based on the small sample size that was confined only to one school. The researcher recommended "that this study should be replicated with a larger population" (p. 147). In conclusion, Casteel stated that teachers must be prepared to teach in diverse school settings to help improve public schools' current conditions.

Taylor (2006) conducted a qualitative case study on twelve low-income high school students, seven African Americans and five Caucasians, from an urban school district. Findings were contrary to Casteel's research study. Students from the former study agreed to be interviewed by the researcher, who served as an assistant principal at the same school where the students attended this high school located in Illinois. One of Taylor's research questions focused on whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers had a significant impact on their academic achievement. Through a cross-case analysis, the findings revealed that African American students "perceive that their teachers, at least initially, have a low expectation of their intelligence and ability to complete their schoolwork" (Taylor, 2006, p. 201). When African American students perceived that their teachers were not "caring about their schoolwork" (p. 208) or academic success, then these students were more likely to stop trying to excel in the classroom (Taylor, 2006). On the other hand, Taylor found that Caucasians students experienced a more positive interaction with their teachers. Caucasians students stated their teachers demonstrated support and "believed that they had the ability to get good grades and that they were intelligent" (Taylor, 2006, p. 200). The researcher suggested that African American students contributed to teachers' racist beliefs, which affected students' overall academic achievement (Taylor, 2006).

#### Referral to Special Education Services

Special education services "refers to specially designed instruction at public expense, including a variety of opportunities on a spectrum from regular classroom instruction and special classes to placement in a private facility" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). A major issue in special education services is the disproportionate number of

African American students who are placed into special education programs compared to other ethnic groups, especially Caucasian students (Andrews, Wisniewski, & Mulick, 1997; Jagers & Carroll, 2002). This section further discusses special education services and teachers' decisions to refer African American students based on perceived learning disabilities. Additionally, it examines the disproportionate number of African American students in the gifted and talented programs.

The placement of students into learning disabilities programs is somewhat unclear and subjective. The identification of students with learning disabilities (LD) lacks consistency from individual school districts and among states (Ford, 1996; Grant & Grant, 2002). Some researchers suggest there are four key areas of dispute regarding LD: (1) individuals cannot decide on a universal definition or an effective approach to measure intelligence; (2) the tests are underestimating students' actual intelligence because it does not consider students' disabilities; (3) a difficulty to identify students who are actually poor readers because their achievement scores are higher; and (4) identifying young students is difficult because they have not developed enough to demonstrate specific learning disabilities (Grant & Grant, 2002). Due to the subjective process, there are more students being classified with learning disabilities (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). In the period of increasing accountability and demands, schools are still required to meet yearly goals despite having a large number of low-achieving students.

Some school districts address issues of low-achieving students by encouraging their teachers to refer more students to special education service (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). There is a correlation between the number of students classified as having learning disabilities and the amount of federal funds a school district can receive for those students



who require additional resources to learn (Odden & Picus, 2004; Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Since the 1970s, the number of disadvantaged and low-income students classified with LD has tripled (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Although receiving more funding appears positive on the surface, it has a harmful effect on specific subgroups of students. Schools gain additional resources at the expense of students' self-concept and self-esteem affecting their future academic success. Researchers have sought a better understanding of the large discrepancy in the placement of African American and Caucasian students who are in special education classes (Harry & Klingner, 2007; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). According to Ornstein and Levine (2006),

Data on special education placement show that students from some racial minority groups are much more likely to be designated for mental retardation programs than are non-Latino white students. African American students, for example, are nearly three times as likely as white students to be in "educable mentally retarded" classes. In addition, black students in special education are approximately twice as likely to spend 60 percent or more of their time outside regular classrooms than are white students with disabilities. Placement in mental retardation categories also correlates highly with students' socioeconomic background and poverty status. (p. 385)

This is a major concern in the African American community because many of these LD students are not receiving an adequate education. The primary goal of public education is to meet students' learning needs through various approaches and teaching methodologies. Teachers are constantly assessing their students' learning abilities and

determining if students are making gradual progress. In some cases, teachers determine that some students are not where they should be based on external factors. For instance, African American students are being “educationally misdiagnosed” and misunderstood based on their overt behavior, such as body language or speech. According to Moore’s (2002) qualitative study, teachers’ decisions to refer African American students to special education services is influenced by students’ overall characteristics (Glenn, 1996). This is an example in which African American students are being penalized for not adapting to mainstream or the school culture. In another study, Casteel (2000) studied 160 African American seventh grade students regarding their beliefs about treatment by Caucasian teachers. This research study demonstrated that African American students believed teachers did not relate to them. The miscommunication between teachers and African American students can accelerate students being placed into special education classes for learning disabilities.

Some researchers believe that African American students are placed into special education classes due to their underperformance on standardized intelligence tests (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1999) stated that California once used IQ tests to determine if African American students required placement into educable mentally retarded classes. In the 1979 case of *Larry P. v. Riles*, a California judge banned the use of IQ tests and similar indicators to determine academic placement or tracking of students (Obiakor & Ford, 2002; Ornstein & Levine, 2006; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). According to Ornstein and Levine (2006), other ethnic groups of students were not administered IQ tests to determine their academic placement. The IQ tests has received a fair amount of criticisms based on the racially and culturally bias

nature, which tends to favor better scholastic achievements among middle-class Caucasian students (Ornstein & Levine, 2006; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). Students who perform exceptionally well on these tests have more exposure to “the skills and knowledge required to do well” (Harry & Klingner, 2007, p. 18). On the contrary, many African American students were at a disadvantaged when they were administered IQ tests due to cultural and economic barriers (Harry & Klingner, 2007). As a result, they were labeled and placed into special education classes. Labeling can have a negative effect and a self-fulfilling prophecy on African American students (McIntosh, 2002).

McIntosh stated that when educators classify or label students with learning disabilities, “they are directly or indirectly saying to that student, ‘You are a problem’” (p. 42). Students with LD are mainstreamed or attend regular classes throughout the day with other students. Throughout some part of the school day, these students are “pulled out” of regular classes and sent to a class with other peers that have some degree of learning disabilities. Although these students may strive to fit in with other students, they are viewed differently because they are labeled. “Special education labeling and categorization perpetuate institutionalized behaviors that have deleterious effects on the educational outcomes of African American students with exceptionalities” (McIntosh, 2002, p. 47).

African American students are not only disproportionately represented in the population of students served by programs for the learning disabled; they are also over-represented in programs serving behaviorally and emotionally disturbed students. Ornstein and Levine (2006) stated that students who are “labeled disturbed may be more inclined to misbehave because the label makes unruly behavior acceptable and expected”

(p. 384). According to the group they have been assigned to, students begin to behave in a manner to reflect the group's characteristics (McIntosh, 2002). African American students are highly susceptible to peer influence and are willing to "opt for the esteem that is gained from peers by acting out" (McIntosh, 2002, p. 46).

The labeling and classification issue continue throughout the students' academic career as they are tracked into specific classes, where they may not learn as much as they would from a regular class (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). "African American are less likely than their Caucasian counterparts are to return to general education classes once identified as eligible to receive special education services" (Graham, 2007, pp. 1-2). Some teachers' negative stereotypes regarding African American students' learning abilities are reaffirmed through various LD labels (McIntosh, 2002). Teachers are mandated to conform to individualized education plans (IEP) in order to accommodate students' specific learning needs. An IEP is a document that outlines specific plan of actions that teachers should perform and resources that schools should provide so students can receive a quality education (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Teachers view this as additional work and planning, which often leads to students receiving an inadequate education. The differences between teachers' beliefs and students' actual ability to achieve has an effect on teachers' expectations for these students. "When goals and values between teachers and students are well aligned, teachers hold high expectations for student performance and for positive educational outcomes" (McIntosh, 2002, pp. 45-46). On the contrary, the opposite effect could lead to lower teacher expectations and poor student performances (Cooney, 2001).

Another type of labeling in special services that also has some degree of a negative impact on African American students is giftedness. The attempts to establish a consensus in defining giftedness is similar to issues experienced with learning disabilities. In 1993, the United States Department of Education defined giftedness as the demonstration of remarkable talents and intellectual abilities to perform substantially above other students at the same age or class (cited in Bonner & Jennings, 2007). According to Ford's (1996) research in gifted African American students, previous studies operationalized giftedness as students receiving high scores either on an IQ or achievement tests. Ford cited Terman believe that students placement in gifted programs was based on "the assumptions that giftedness is synchronous with intelligence and that intelligence can be measured by standardized tests" (p. 9). Many researchers argued that the concept of measuring intelligence is complex and multidimensional; hence, it warrants more than simply relying on IQ or achievement tests to identify potential students (Ford, 1996).

Students who are labeled as gifted receive special education services through gifted and talented (GT) programs that are beyond the scope of traditional or regular education students. Similar to students with learning disabilities, gifted students also receive individualized education plans (Ornstein & Levine, 2006). The small number of students in gifted and talented (GT) programs, as opposed to the large number of students in the learning disabled classes is significant among African Americans; this has an effect on the achievement gap. In this case, the achievement gap is demonstrated by the significantly higher number of African American and disadvantaged students referred to LD classes, while this same subgroup of students is less likely to be referred to GT

programs. Ford suggested that GT programs are “the most segregated programs in public schools. They are disproportionately White and middle class, and they serve primarily intellectually and academically gifted students” (p. 191). The root of the inexcusably differences are caused from African American and disadvantaged students that are gifted and not being identified because they do not share the same culture or do they relate well to mainstream (Ford, 1996). Researchers believe that increasing the number of African American students in GT programs would be advantageous to school systems because it could help to reverse underachievement and minimize the academic achievement gap (Ford, 1996). Although this idea appears to be plausible, the difficulty is determining effective methods opposed to relying on unidimensional approaches in identifying and attracting more African American students into GT programs. Literature has suggested that, in order to identify more African American students, the definitions of giftedness should be broadened to “include indicators such as very strong problem-solving skills, high creativity, high verbal or nonverbal fluency, and unusual artistic accomplishments and abilities” (Ornstein & Levine, 2006).

Although many individuals may positively view the identification of students as being gifted, African American students share a different perspective. Even when African Americans are placed into GT programs, their esteem for their peers does not change. The effect of labeling African American students as gifted has similar consequences to those that often occur when students are labeled as learning disabled. There are external factors that determine African American students’ future success in GT programs. For instance, African American students who are in GT programs in a predominantly African American school setting have a higher self-awareness than African American students in

a more diverse or integrated school setting (Ford, 1996). Although African American GT students in an integrated school setting are educated in the same classroom with a majority of Caucasian students, they do not necessarily share the same culture or background experience (Ford, 1996). Throughout the school day, many African American GT students become distant from their neighborhood friends with whom they share a common bond through culture, value, and experiences. This can often lead to African American GT students being ostracized for their intelligence and giftedness (Ford, 1995; Ford, 1996; Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004). The African American culture equates demonstrating intelligence as a form of unusual behavior or ‘acting White.’ “The contention that many African American youths avoid academic achievement because of a peer culture that declares academic achievement a White domain and that negatively labels achievement-related behaviors as ‘acting White’” (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004, pp. 81-82). Educators are instrumental in helping African American students to value a quality education. Teachers and administrators should consider the culture differences and emphasize to African American students that it is acceptable to excel in the classroom (Ford, 1996). If necessary, educators should undergo multicultural training to learn effective teaching strategies and methods that would encourage African American students to positively change their perception of obtaining an education (Ford, 1996; Quintanar-Sarellana, 1997; Reglin, 1995).

In summary, special education services tend to have a negative connotation and impact upon African American students. Due to increasing school accountability and high stakes testing, school systems are driven to label African American and disadvantaged students as learning disabled (White & Rosenbaum, 2008). Although

school systems benefit through additional funds to support special services, it has a negative effect on African American students' self-concept. At one end of the academic ability spectrum, there are African American students with learning disabilities and at the other end are African American students who are gifted and talented. School faculty members could aid African American students to be more acceptable of academic excellence. These efforts could eventually help to minimize the academic achievement gap that is evident in special education services. Overtime, there should be a push to decrease underachievement among African American students and replace it with more African American students being identified for gifted and talented programs (Ford, 1996).

#### Discipline Gap and the Juvenile Justice System

While some African American students tend to perform below other subgroups of students in the classroom, they are likely to receive far greater discipline and consequences for their actions. When school administrators are disciplining these students, then these students are losing instructional time (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). Gregory, Nygreen, and Moran are several researchers that explored the academic achievement and discipline gaps through Diversity Project at Berkeley High School (BHS) in California. Data collection and analyses occurred between 1996 and 2002. The researchers asserted,

Like many other schools, BHS has been stuck in a vicious cycle of reproduction. It disproportionately punishes its neediest student by denying them the opportunity to learn, and it does so even though there is no evidence that it succeeds at either changing student behavior or



improving the climate for learning. (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006, p. 122)

Students that are reprimanded and are assigned either in in-school or out-of-school suspensions begin to lag behind their peers.

Another issue beyond missing classroom instruction is African American students' perception that they are wrongfully accused and are punished more severely (Sheets & Gay, 1996). Teachers too often misunderstand and misinterpret African American students' traditions, cultures, and social styles (Reglin, 1995). Teachers perceive some of their African American students as habitually demonstrating negative classroom behaviors (Schwartz, 2002). On the other hand, many African American students perceived acting out, misbehaving, or horse playing in class as being acceptable and are encouraged to do so by their peers (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). When African American students misbehave, they are reprimanded at a disproportionately higher rate than other racial or ethnic groups of students (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

African American students at Berkeley High School demonstrated similar results. In fall 1998, while African American students comprised 38% of the student body, the findings indicated they contributed to 70% of 2,000 referrals for in-school suspensions (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). African American students experienced a 6% increase in referrals during fall 1999. Similarly, out-of-school suspensions were higher for African American students (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). African American students "were disproportionately represented for both the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school years, making up 67 percent and 68 percent of all suspensions, respectively"

(Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006, p. 134). Caucasian students experience lighter disciplinary actions for their infractions compared to African American students (Skiba et al., 2002). When a Caucasian student misbehaves, then that student receives a verbal warning (Schwartz, 2002). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that

While high-income students more often reported receiving mild and moderate consequences (e.g., teacher reprimand, seat reassignment), low-income students reported receiving more severe consequences, sometimes delivered in a less-than-professional manner (e.g., yelled at in front of class, made to stand in hall all day, search of personal belongings). (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 319)

In a general school environment, teachers are responsible for administering discipline actions as determine appropriate for specific classroom infractions. In many situations, the punishment does not always fit the infraction that is committed by African American students, especially among those students that are from a lower socioeconomic class (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002). Despite many rationales regarding the academic achievement gap, there is also a gap in school discipline among African American students compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This discrepancy is often referred to as the discipline gap, the “administration of school discipline is the overrepresentation of minorities, especially African-American students, in the use of exclusionary and punitive consequences” (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 319). Although some African American students generally perform lower than other groups of students in the classroom, they are highly likely to receive far greater discipline and consequences for

their actions which remains unclear to many educators and researchers (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Monroe, 2005a).

Gregory and Mosely (2004) conducted a qualitative research study regarding the discipline gap and over-representation of African American students receiving disciplinary actions. The researchers stated that the discipline gap is actually a “reverse for the African American, white, and Asian students” (p. 19). Findings indicated teachers’ beliefs about the discipline gap was contributed to African American students’ lack of home structure, low motivation to learn, and rebellious behaviors and attitudes toward authority figures (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). An interesting finding was that teachers were “colorblind” and did not perceived African American students’ race as the root of the dilemma. Although teachers did not perceive race as a factor, the researchers asserted “the racialized expectation that they are ‘behavioral problems’ may lead to teachers interpreting particular behaviors in a manner that creates a discipline moment” (Gregory & Mosely, 2004, p. 27) for African American students.

“Many studies indicated that teachers identify elevated voice levels, self-initiated student speech, self-directed student movement, displays of emotion and pupil-to-pupil interaction as inappropriate classroom behaviors” (Monroe, 2005b, p. 321). Although those actions are perceived as disruptive, it is documented as a part of the norm for the African American culture (Skiba et al., 2002). Caucasian teachers too often misunderstand African American students’ traditions and social styles (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). Although the state and district curricula are influenced by various cultures and backgrounds, Monroe (2005b) stated that “teachers’ behavioral expectations, rules and policies are closely aligned with norms found in White and middle-class circles as

well” (p. 321). Furthermore, Monroe (2005b) stated that “findings from existent research studies suggest that Black students are routinely disciplined for culturally based behaviors that are not intended to be disruptive” (p. 321). Many teachers teach and interact with these students with minimal experience or pre-service multicultural education training (Quintanar-Sarellana, 1997; Reglin, 1995). Therefore, it is not unusual for teachers to believe the negative stereotypes depicted of African Americans through the media as being out of control and threatening (Monroe, 2005a). Monroe (2005a) asserted, “both media and scholarly portrayals of contemporary black life often highlight cultures of violence, drugs, antiauthoritarianism, and other social deficiencies” (p. 46).

“The disproportionate discipline of African-American students has been extensively documented; yet the reasons for those disparities are less well understood” (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 317). The authors stated that the disproportionate number of discipline referrals became significant after school integration (Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, African American students tend to receive harsher penalties for their misbehavior compared to Caucasian students or those from higher socioeconomic status (Fenning & Rose, 2007). Skiba et al. discussed a 1999 alleged gang fight that occurred in Decatur, Illinois among seven African American males. The school district’s superintendent reacted to the fight by recommending to the School Board that each student should be expelled from high school for two years. As a result, local citizens and Operation PUSH began to protest against the harsh punishment. Although the School Board decided to lessen the expulsion to one year, Operation PUSH filed a law suit “alleging procedural improprieties, harsh punishments exceeding the offense, and racial bias” (Skiba et al., 2002, p. 318). A judge rejected the law suit on all counts and ruled

that the school district was acting within its rights. Though the school board did what they believe was in the best interest of the school, Skiba et al. argued that the punishment was too severe for the African American students' actions that did not involve any weapons, while other students that were found to have weapons received a lesser punishment for their actions.

School districts should ensure that every child receives a quality education, while learning in a safe and protective environment. The issue is deciding what is fair and equitable punishment for African American students opposed to sanctions that are not appropriate for the infractions. Based on the national attention and media coverage regarding the Decatur' brawl, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Secretary of Education began to consider the impact of zero tolerance and racial injustice in how school administrators issued disciplinary actions. Some people believed that zero tolerance would only result in more African American students being expelled from school and not necessarily have made schools safer, learning environments. Black (2004) stated "Policies of zero tolerance do not make schools safe, even though many educators see them as the backbone of school discipline" (p. 27). The purpose of zero tolerance is to ensure that if a student instigates a dangerous situation, he or she should immediately be removed from the school campus. The deciding factor for administrators is to differentiate between those situations that are threatening versus non-threatening. When school administrators apply harsh punishments to African American students, these students lose invaluable time away from classroom instructions. Moreover, research has demonstrated that

Every day throughout the United States, children are being shut out of the education system through the application of Zero Tolerance Policies.

These policies require that children in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade receive harsh punishments, often for minor infractions that pose no threat to safety, and yet cause them and their families severe hardship...More alarming than the punishment meted out in misconduct is the tracking of children into the juvenile justice system for minor misconduct in school.

Often African-American, Latino, and disabled children bear the brunt of the consequences of these policies. (Advancement Project & Civil Rights Project, 2000, p. 1)

Furthermore, Advancement Project and Civil Rights Project found that schools with a high rate of suspension are strongly correlated to schools with a high rate of African American students that were on suspension. Research demonstrates a positive correlation between high rate of African American students being suspended and dropping out of school (Monroe, 2005a; Skiba et al., 2002).

### Stereotype Threat

According to research studies focused on African American students, the academic achievement gap exists primarily not because these students belong to a lower socioeconomic status (SES), are unprepared for kindergarten, or lack the motivation to learn. Rather, it is due to a phenomenon called stereotype threat. African American students experience a sense of stereotype threat or the notion of believing that they must confirm the negative stereotypes that are associated with their race (Honora, 2003). Steele (1997) defined stereotype threat as “the event of a negative stereotype about a group to

which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience one is having, or for a situation one is in, that has relevance to one's self-definition" (p. 616). In order for negative stereotypes to have any threats towards African American students, it must first of all have some relevance to them. For instance, many African American students feel as if they are not supposed to be smart and that other races or ethnic groups are far more intelligent than they are. Therefore, they do not devote adequate effort to school because they believe that it will only result in failure. These students perceive schools to be unimportant and that obtaining academic success is a farfetched goal to achieve. This sense of inadequacy leads to a lack of response to education and ultimately resulting in school dropout.

Although standardized testing is used to measure students' knowledge at a specific grade level or content, it has negative effects on African American students' academic success due to stereotype threat. Mayer and Hanges (2003) conducted a research study on the effects of stereotype threats on test achievement with 62 African American and 90 Caucasian undergraduates from a Mid-Atlantic university. The experimental design was a 2 x 2 between-subject design in which participants were informed they were taking a test to measure intelligence (stereotype threat variable) or perceptual ability (non-stereotype threat variable) (Mayer & Hanges, 2003). Findings indicated a significant interaction between variables for race and awareness of intelligence test at  $F(1, 112) = 5.02, p \leq .05, \Delta R^2 = 0.03$ . The researchers asserted African Americans "who are told a test is diagnostic of intelligence experience more stereotype threat related to that test" (Mayer & Hanges, 2003, p. 228). For many years, African American students believed that these tests were biased and that Caucasian students

would outperform them. Consequently, when African American students take standardized tests, they are already defeated due to the obstacle that they have placed before themselves. They enter into a testing center with increasing anxiety and stress believing that they will not do as well as they should. As a result, they tend to perform lower than Caucasian students perhaps due to racial stereotypes. On the contrary, if the same questions were asked of African American students in a non-evaluative or non-threatening manner, then these students perform just as well as their counterparts (Honora, 2003; Mayer & Hanges, 2003).

Additionally, in a laboratory experiment, Steele (1999) discovered that when he informed African American students that they would have to take a standardized test that measured their intellectual abilities, their performances were substantially less than the Caucasian students even though both groups of students had similar cognitive abilities. Afterwards, Steele informed the same group of African American students that they were going to take a test that did not measure their intellectual abilities. These students performed just as well as the Caucasian students, which demonstrated that the African American students were just as intelligent and as prepared to take the exam. Furthermore, it demonstrated that African American students were insecure and perceived the testing situation as a negative stereotype which overpowered their self-confidence.

African American students' self-perception and level of confidence was also developed by the ways Caucasians perceived them. Niemann, O'Connor, and McClorie (1998) found that African American students described themselves with harsh, negative stereotypes, such as "unintelligent, unemployed, drug user, criminal activities" (p. 106). Likewise, in the same study, Caucasian students described African American students by



using the same descriptive words. On the other hand, African American students also viewed themselves in a positive manner by describing themselves as “hard worker, believed in God, masculine, well groomed, good parents, athletic, humorous, easy going, creative” (Niemann et al., 1998, p. 105). When Caucasians students were asked to describe several positive characteristics regarding African American students, they used simple descriptions, such as “athletic, proud, and good dancer” (Niemann et al., 1998, p. 105), which are the basic adjectives that many people used to describe African American students. Based on the Caucasians students’ beliefs about African American students, they apparently believed that African American students do not excel in academics or in an area that requires cognitive abilities. Roderick (2003) stated, “There is a common perception that African American adolescents, particularly males, are the most likely to turn away from school and form peer groups that discourage them from working hard and succeeding” (p. 539). On the other hand, African American students used more complex, descriptive characteristics regarding Caucasian students, such as “alcohol user, sexually active, obnoxious, phony, racist, achievement-oriented, attractive, sexy, pleasant/friendly” (Niemann et al., 1998, p. 106). Niemann and colleagues stated that Caucasians limited experiences and exposure to African Americans was contributed to a segregated society regarding the neighborhoods that are separated by races. In many instances, African Americans and Caucasians interactions often occurred at work or school during the weekdays. On the weekends, the interactions were very limited between the two groups.

Regardless of Caucasian teachers’ limited interactions with African American students, all teachers regardless of race have an important role in assisting African

American students in effective strategies to deal with stereotype threats. These negative feelings can diminish through continual teacher support. Conversely, if teachers maintain lower expectations for this group of students, then it can intensify the dilemma. Students should be willing to associate a sense of belonging and thrive to develop a concept of the importance of a quality education in order to set aside their stereotype threats. Taylor (2006) found that when teachers believed that African American students were able to be successful in the classroom and showed support, these students were “more likely to be academically engaged and have higher academic achievement” (p. 203).

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning the counterargument to the stereotype threat theory. Although Steele proposed eliminating stereotype threats or having African American students take a rigorous exam in a non-threatening environment to improve test scores, Sackett, Hardison, and Cullen (2004) suggested Steele has misinterpreted his own study. Sackett et al. counter asserted that the notion that African American and Caucasian students are equally intelligent if stereotype threats were eliminated will only lead to educators and researchers believing that other potential factors are no longer to blame for the test gap. As a result, energy and attention will deviate from researchers studying the effects that lower SES, lack of school readiness, and race have on children. Furthermore, Sackett et al. believed that continued research in stereotype threats is warranted but readers must be made aware of misinterpretations.

#### Social Alienation and Disidentification

There is not a universal approach to educating all students. Many students come to school with various issues and problems that are totally out of the control of teachers and school administrators. On the other hand, teachers share a responsibility to educate

students regardless of their backgrounds and issues they may bring into the classroom. This is often a difficult task when some African American students equate being intelligent and studious as attempting to be white or of the Caucasian race (Crawford, 2002; Viadero & Johnston, 2000). Crawford's study emphasized this phenomenon on a study of rural African American eighth grade males' academic achievement as measured by the mathematics score on the South Carolina Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), which has four categories: below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced. Although the basic categories reported a higher mean score for African American students than any other categories, "these students' math performance exceeded the Proficient and Advanced students' math performance" (Crawford, 2002, p. 56). The researcher asserted that the students' poor performance was intentional in order to maintain a minimal level on PACT scores.

There are a range of indicators that positively influence school achievement. Some studies that demonstrate that students who can easily identify with a school's academic culture have an increase in academic motivation to succeed and will experience far greater educational gains opposed to students that cannot relate (Honora, 2003). The process of students becoming engaged in school involves behavioral and emotional components. Students who value their school culture are behaviorally more likely to exhibit high classroom participation, near perfect attendance, and active engagement in extracurricular activities (Ware, 2006). Emotionally, these students feel a sense of acceptance, valued, and belonging. This also supports Maslow's Hierarchy of Need in which individuals must feel loved and nurtured (Prescott & Simpson, 2004). As a result,

emotionally, these students achieve high academic gains because they value education and realize its importance in life.

In addressing the academic achievement gap, there should be a thorough examination to identify rationales supporting why some African American students are performing exceptionally well academically, while other students are struggling to stay in school (Honora, 2003). It may be contributed to the school environment and arrangement; the school climate may be quite inviting; parents' participation and parents are viewed as an extension of the school; and teachers are willing to leave their comfort zone. There are many factors that contribute to students either identifying or not identifying with their school culture. The multiplicities of problems develop when those students who tend to feel alienated, disengaged, and harbor a sense of feeling out of place while in school or being in certain teachers' classrooms (Honora, 2003). On the contrary, these same African American students find themselves accepted in sports and other extracurricular events that require little to no academic skills. They tend to be the center of attention and valued for their athletic abilities. This is the time that they are no longer seated at the back of the class and viewed as unimportant, but they are leading their athletic teams to victories. These African American students learn early on life that their places are not in the classroom, but rather in a sporting event.

These feelings of disidentification are contributed to by such factors as negative teachers' expectations for African American students to achieve or maintaining lower standards for these students compared to other groups of students. For instance, some teachers have a preconceived notion or expectation that these students cannot perform at a given academic level compared to other students in the same class; therefore, these

teachers do not devote the extra time and energy to challenge these students to perform at grade level. Students often feel disidentified with schools based on being placed in lower performing classes with peers that are also struggling learners. Honora (2003) suggested these students do not receive adequate attention and the teacher support as those students that are placed in high academic performing classes. Due to academic tracking, these students begin to develop a mindset that they are inferior and not as smart as their classmates. Society in general often views African Americans as being inferior in life. This crippling mentality has stemmed from the origin of slavery and continues to haunt African American students today. Thus, these students feel as if they are not able to compete in the classroom because they are not smart enough. Although this belief is not necessarily true, it remains in the teachers' hands to help African American students view school differently. Research has demonstrated that teacher support has a direct impact on African American success in the classroom (Honora, 2003). Since this is the case, there remain too many African American students that are not academically successful and end up dropping out of school because of lack of support and nurturing from teachers. As a result, these students never stand a chance of developing a social and academic identity with school culture.

A number of psychological and educational researches have demonstrated that disadvantaged African American students tend to perform at a lower level in the classroom compared to Caucasian and Asian students (Osborne, 2001). The disadvantaged African American students received lower grades from teachers, scored much lower on standardized tests, and contributed far greater to the dropout rate. There are many arguments that support the outcome in why these students are receiving lower

academic gains due to poor academic preparation, such as their parents are of a lower socioeconomic status, and they are simply disengaged from learning. Even when external or background factors remained constant, African-American students continued to perform lower than other groups of students (Steele, 1997). The academic achievement gap does not decrease with time, rather it continues to widen as students matriculate through high school. So, even when African American students are given adequate resources to succeed in the classroom, the question remains ‘why do they continue to lag behind their counterparts?’

African American students experience a sense of disidentification with school culture due to stereotype threat or the notion of believing that they must confirm the negative stereotypes that are associated to their race (Honora, 2003). In this particular case, many African American students feel as if they are not supposed to be smart and that other races or ethnic groups are far more intelligent than they are. Therefore, they do not devote adequate effort to school believing that it will only result in failing. These students perceive schools to be unimportant and that obtaining academic success is a farfetched goal to achieve. These negative feelings may be eradicated through continual teacher support (Honora, 2003). On the contrary, if teachers maintain lower expectations for this group of students, then it can intensify the dilemma. Students must be willing to associate a sense of belonging and thrive to develop a concept of the importance of a quality education in order to set aside their stereotype threat. When teachers believe in students and show support, then these students tend to value the school culture.

There are various indicators that positively influence school achievement. Studies demonstrate that students who can easily identify with a school’s academic culture have

an increase in academic motivation to succeed and will experience far greater educational gains opposed to students that cannot relate to the academic culture (Honora, 2003). The process of students becoming engaged in school involves behavioral and emotional components (Howard, 2002). Howard's qualitative study regarding African American students' beliefs about their learning environment indicated teachers have a critical role of helping students to attain academic achievement. The researcher asserted, "Knowledge and understanding of students' cultural backgrounds allow teachers to make explicit connections from students' lives, values, and experiences outside of the classroom to experience and knowledge inside the classroom" (Howard, 2002, p. 441).

Students who value their school culture are behaviorally more likely to exhibit high classroom participation, near perfect attendance, and active engagement in extracurricular activities. Emotionally, these students feel a sense of acceptance, valued, and belonging. This also supports Maslow's Hierarchy of Need in which individuals must feel loved and nurtured (Prescott & Simpson, 2004). As a result, emotionally, these students achieve high academic gains because they value education and realize its importance in life.

### Summary

This chapter provided readers with the theoretical foundation that undergird the premise of this research study. The researcher explored prior literature regarding African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the impact of these beliefs on academic outcomes. Studies demonstrated that there are disproportionately high numbers of African American students identified for special education services for the learning disabled and disproportionately low numbers placed in programs for gifted and talented

students. Additionally, Chapter II provided literature review on stereotype threats and social alienation among African American students. Some researchers consider the academic achievement gap existed because African American students have a difficult time relating to mainstream or adapting to school culture. The next chapter discussed the research methodology.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between students' beliefs and academic outcomes. The primary focus was an analysis of significant relationships between African American students' beliefs about teachers and academic outcomes such as composite report card grades. There were also an analysis of significant relationships between African American students' beliefs about teachers and discipline referrals and referrals to special services. The research was conducted in rural elementary schools located in a southeastern state. Chapter III provides the following: a restatement of the research questions and hypotheses; a description of the research design; an explanation of the descriptive research to obtain general data on the sample; an explanation of participant selection; the instrumentation development process and the psychometric properties; and, the analytical procedures that will be used after the data have been collected.

#### Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study focused on the following research questions:

- (1) Is there a significant correlation between African American students' self-beliefs and the composite report card grades they receive?
- (2) Is there a significant correlation between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the composite report card grades they receive?
- (3) Is there a significant correlation between African American students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals they receive?

- (4) Is there a significant correlation between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals they receive?
- (5) Is there a significant correlation between African American students' who experience stereotype threats and the composite report card grades they receive?

This study focused on the following hypotheses:

- (1) There is a correlation between African American students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades.
- (2) There is a correlation between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and their composite report card grades.
- (3) There is a relationship between African American students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals received.
- (4) There is a relationship between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals received.
- (5) There is a relationship between African American students' who experience stereotype threats and academic achievement.

#### Descriptive Statistics

This study obtained general descriptive statistics by addressing the following questions:

- (1) What percentages of African American students have positive as opposed to negative beliefs about their teachers?
- (2) What percentages of African American students who are on academic honor rolls have positive as opposed to negative beliefs about their teachers?

- (3) What percentages of African American students believe that they “earn” as opposed to “are given” grades of A and/or B?
- (4) What percentages of African American students believe that they “deserve” as opposed to “unfairly receive” discipline sanctions?
- (5) How many African American students receive discipline referrals and how many discipline referrals did each student receive?
- (6) How many African American students have been referred to special education services?
- (7) How many African American students are retained at grade level and the frequencies of retention at each grade level?

### Research Design

This research study utilized a quantitative research design in order to examine the research questions and hypotheses. Quantitative research is a type of research that is more concerned about relationships among variables and the outcomes of an experiment (Heddle, 2002; Wiersma, 1995). Thomas (1998) stated that quantitative research “compares the amounts of frequencies of the characteristics that are being investigated” (p. 5). This theoretically-based research design utilizes the scientific method process and deductive reasoning to determine how interactions between variables affect the outcomes (Wiersma, 1995). Research questions and hypotheses are developed and tested (Heddle, 2002). According to Glatthorn (1998), quantitative research is objective in nature and has an experimental design which relies on measurements. There are various research approaches that can be used in quantitative analysis; but the focus of this study will rely

primarily on correlational research. Researchers conduct correlational studies to analyze relationships that may exist between variables (Glatthorn).

There are several variables that were used in this study. The first dependent variable (DV) was students' academic achievement, which was demonstrated through students' composite report card grades. Other student level DVs included discipline referrals, referrals to special education services, and grade retentions, which were obtained from central office administrators. The researcher assigned a unique code number to students and teachers that were used only for the purposes of this research study. The independent variables (IV) were analyzed to determine whether or not they were correlated to the following DVs: (1) students' self-beliefs and stereotype threats regarding academic achievement and discipline referrals and (2) students' beliefs about their teachers. The researcher tested each variable to determine if there were any correlations.

Additional analyses of the data were conducted for several reasons. First, because of the researcher's concerns regarding the ethical administration of the instrument, the researcher determined that it would be inappropriate to administer the student survey instrument only to African American students in classrooms where the research was conducted. Because the expansion of the distribution of the instrument produced additional data, it was concluded that these results should also be analyzed. The additional data yielded an opportunity for analysis of relationships among variables not previously contemplated as part of the original research design.

## Participants

The study focused on 34 African American students in a rural school district located within a southeastern state. The researcher performed additional analyses for data collected on 65 Caucasian students. After receiving notification from IRB (Appendix A) to conduct the research study, the researcher contacted via e-mail and telephone school district officials who worked closely with the at-risk or special services programs and provided a brief summary of the study (see Appendix B). The school district in which permission was granted participated in the study (see Appendix C).

Students were selected based on current grade level; the grade span was limited to fifth graders. Students who participated in the study were informed that participation in this research project was voluntary. Each student was given an active consent form (see Appendix D) and other pertinent research study information (see Appendix E) to take home to his or her parent or guardian. Only students who were given active consent by a parent or guardian were given a survey instrument to participate in the research.

## Instrumentation

This study involved a student questionnaire (Appendix F) comprised of 52 questions regarding African American students' beliefs about their school environment, classroom environment, and discipline behavior. The construction of the instrument was guided by prior literature review. Upon completion and a successful proposal defense, the researcher implemented a pilot study. The initial phase of the process was to assemble an expert panel comprised of four members to examine each item found on the questionnaire. The purpose of a pilot study was to explore and establish psychometric properties of the instrument's validity and reliability. According to Raj (1972), reliability

is concerned about the consistency of an instrument. The instrument should ensure participants will generally respond in the same manner on repeated measurements. The researcher establishes validity only when the instrument demonstrates it measures what it is intending to measure. On the contrary, “the response obtained will not be valid if it differs from the true value aimed at” (Raj, 1972, p. 119).

The researcher sought the panel’s expertise to establish the questionnaire’s clarity, comprehensiveness, and acceptability (Rea & Parker, 1992). The clarity involved the level to which participants understood the questions that were presented in the questionnaires (Rea & Parker, 1992). This was critical to the researcher because the validity of the instrument was established when participants’ understood and responded to questions that correspond to the proposed research questions and hypotheses. The comprehensiveness of an instrument was attained when the questions that are being asked contained a range of alternative responses (Rea & Parker, 1992). Thus, a participant was able to answer every question by selecting his or her answer choice, or he or she could have selected neutral. The comprehensiveness of an instrument was also attained if the questions were reflective of prior literature and whether it was sufficient to address the research questions of the study (Rea & Parker, 1992). The panel of experts also monitored the instruments acceptability; or determined if the instruments violated any ethical issues and whether they were appropriate for the participants (Rea & Parker, 1992). Instrument acceptability was also determining the appropriate length of the questionnaire.

The students’ questionnaire contained 52 questions that were in a five-point Likert scale rating format. Respondents selected from the following choices: 1. Strongly

Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, and 5. Strongly Agree. The desired rating scale was selected based on the research questions, which sought to explore students' beliefs and attitudes. "The Likert scale works particularly well in the context of a series of questions that seek to elicit attitudinal information about one specific subject matter" (Rea & Parker, 1992, p.74). Student participants were instructed to leave a question blank or skip any questions about which they were unsure. The researcher ensured the test design was appropriate for elementary school students and reported a readability index at the fifth grade level. The readability index was provided by creating a document in Microsoft Word and accessing that feature through spell check. After the expert panel reviewed the questionnaire, the researcher piloted the instruments with 10 participants to determine if they were able to comprehend each question.

Cronbach's alphas and scale reliability measures were derived for three sub-scales: students' positive beliefs toward teachers, students' negative beliefs toward teachers, and students' self-beliefs. Each sub-scale demonstrated reliability at the .75 level or above. Students' positive beliefs toward teachers had a Cronbach's alpha = .77, students' negative beliefs toward teachers had a Cronbach's alpha = .83, and students' self-beliefs had a Cronbach's alpha = .76. Based on the above values of Cronbach's alphas, the instrument has a reasonable level of reliability.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The data gathering process involved collecting archival data and student participants' responses from questionnaires. Upon receiving signed active parent/guardian permission forms, the school official gave each student participant a unique identifier code. This code was placed in the upper right corner of each 52-item

survey. The school official contacted each elementary school principal to arrange a convenient date and time to administer the survey. Afterwards, each member of a team of seven research assistants was assigned to one of seven participating schools. Once the research assistants arrived to the schools, they were instructed to go only to designated classrooms where students submitted a signed active parent/guardian permission form. The research assistants obtained students' signature on the student participants' assent form (see Appendix G). After the short briefing, the research assistants distributed the surveys in a 9" x 12" envelope. Students were instructed to complete the survey to the best of their knowledge. Additionally, students were informed that they did not have to answer any questions that may have made them feel uncomfortable. Upon completing the survey, students returned the questionnaires into the enclosed envelopes. The research assistants returned the signed participants' assent forms and surveys to the district official.

The second phase of data collection was gathering archival data. The district official obtained the following archival data: gender; ethnicity; attendance record (including tardiness and absenteeism); disciplinary records, including the number of reported infractions; and end-of-year composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The aforementioned data were transferred from the school district's database into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The first column of the spreadsheet contained the unique identifier code, which was used to link archival data with survey responses.

The district official submitted an electronic spreadsheet of the archival data and the student participants' surveys to the researcher. The researcher arranged each



questionnaire by its unique identifier code in ascending order. The Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was converted into an SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 15.0 data file. After creating an SPSS data file, the researcher entered each survey based on its unique identifier code.

### Statistical Analytical Procedures

Once the survey instruments were returned, the variables and related data were analyzed using various statistical methods using SPSS 15.0. Descriptive statistics (mode, median, mean, and standard deviations) were generated. Correlation analyses, Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) and Spearman's correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ), were used to analyze and generate comparative findings.

### Summary

This research addressed attitudinal and relational dimensions of the academic achievement and discipline gaps. This chapter provided the research methodology, which included a description of the research design, research questions and hypotheses, participants, and instrumentation design. This study utilized one survey instrument to collect data. This instrument has several subscales: students' positive beliefs toward their teachers, students' negative beliefs toward their teachers, and students' self-beliefs. The instrument has a reasonable level of reliability based on Cronbach's alphas were greater than .75. The instrument contained questions regarding African American students' beliefs about their school environment, classroom environment, and discipline behavior. The overarching theme of this study was to determine whether African American students' beliefs about their teachers had an effect on composite report card grades and discipline referrals. The specific research design that was employed was a quantitative

analysis, which focused upon variables and their effect on outcomes. Chapter IV provides the results obtained from the descriptive and comparative findings.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the data that were collected and analyzed regarding the research questions and hypotheses. This chapter contains descriptive and comparative findings relative to the subjects who participated in this research study. This study examined the correlations between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and impact on academic achievement, discipline referrals, and referrals to special education. Additionally, this study examined the correlations between African American students' self-beliefs and impact on academic achievement, discipline referrals, and referrals to special education.

Based on the previously mentioned ethical concerns, the researcher also collected data on Caucasian and Hispanic students to avoid singling out African American students for the study. Since the data were collected, it was appropriate for the researcher to analyze the data collected on Caucasian students and report these findings in the Ancillary Analyses section. The data collected on Hispanic students were not analyzed because the sample size for these students was too small to conduct any statistical analyses.

#### Descriptive Findings

This study was conducted based on data collected from seven elementary schools located in a rural public school district in a southeastern state. The original sample size was 105 fifth graders with 61.9% Caucasians, 32.4% African Americans, and 5.7% Hispanics. Due to the small sample size of Hispanic students (6), statistical analyses

were applied only to African Americans and Caucasians. The sample included 16 African American females, 18 African American males, 27 Caucasian females, and 38 Caucasian males. Therefore, the total sample size was  $N = 99$ . The findings first address data from the African American participants, as they were the original focus of the research questions and hypotheses.

The researcher performed several descriptive analyses on African American students. The first descriptive analysis depicts the attendance record. Table 1 includes the range, mean, and SD of African American students' ( $N = 34$ ) absenteeism and tardiness. In the second descriptive analysis, the researcher presented African American students' end of the year composite report card grades from the four core subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. There were 17 African American students (50%) who earned average grades of B or higher (greater than a numerical grade of 85), which was computed by calculating the mean of the subject areas. Table 2 contains the range, means, and SD for each of the subject areas. African American students ( $N = 34$ ) did not have any missing data. There was one African American (3%) student who was required to attend summer school for failing one or more core subjects. There was not an African American student retained at grade level for the following academic year.

#### Subscales

After performing the general descriptive statistics, the researcher evaluated several subscales: self-beliefs, positive beliefs toward teachers, and negative beliefs toward teachers derived from the 52-item questionnaire. The self-beliefs scale was derived based on students' responses to 12 items. A five-point Likert scale was employed ranging with options from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of African American Students' Frequency of Absenteeism and Tardiness*

	Range	Mean	SD
Absenteeism	0-24	2.62	5.03
Tardiness	0-18	2.85	4.49

Table 2

*African American Students' End-of-Year Report Card Grades*

Subject Area	N	Range	Mean	SD
Language Arts	34	61-99	86.97	7.20
Mathematics	34	68-100	85.06	8.05
Science	34	73-99	85.97	7.39
Social Studies	34	68-99	85.44	7.99
<i>Average</i>	34	69.25-99.25	85.86	7.00

5 = strongly agree. A reliability analysis was performed on these items and generated a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .72 (N = 92). The 12 items were combined to calculate a score on a new variable called “students’ self-beliefs” (see Table 3).

The positive beliefs toward teacher subscale was derived based on students’ responses to nine items. A five-point Likert scale was employed ranging with options from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. A reliability analysis was performed on these items and generated a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .74 (N = 96). These items were combined to calculate a score on a new variable called “positive beliefs toward teachers” (see Table 4).

The negative beliefs of teacher subscale was derived from 13 items. The researcher recoded each of the negative beliefs toward teachers’ items to maintain consistency with other items found in the questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale was employed ranging with options from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. A reliability analysis was performed on these items and generated a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .84 (N = 92). The 13 items were combined to calculate a score on a new variable called “negative beliefs toward teachers” (see Table 5).

There were 18 items on the questionnaire that did not highly correlate with any of the three subscales. Thus, these items had low reliability and were not used in the subscales (see Table 6).

#### African American Students’ Self-Beliefs

The students’ self-beliefs variable was used to address African American students’ responses regarding whether or not they “earned” as opposed to “were given”

Table 3

*African American Students' Self-Beliefs Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)
1	Enjoy going to school and learning new things	33	4.27 (.63)
2	Get along with all of my teachers	33	4.36 (.74)
10	Study and earn good grades because it is important to me	33	4.48 (.71)
12	Am in the right classes that challenge me to learn	31	4.26 (.73)
13	Am in classes with other students that have the same ability level	33	3.39 (.86)
14	Am in the smart class	32	3.63 (1.07)
15	Should be in gifted and talented classes so I can learn more	32	3.78 (1.21)
19	Belong in a higher class because I am smart	33	3.12 (1.24)
20	Like doing with other students	33	4.09 (.84)
23	Raise my hand in class and ask questions	33	3.97 (.95)
42	Do not get into any trouble at school	33	3.52 (1.12)
44	Feel bad when I do get into trouble at school	33	3.97 (1.08)
<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>		33	3.90 (.47)



Table 4

*African American Students' Positive Beliefs Toward Teachers Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)
2	Get along with all of my teachers	33	4.36 (.74)
4	Am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my homework	33	4.03 (.85)
5	Like all of my teachers and feel as if I can talk to them about anything	33	4.00 (1.06)
25	Respect and care about me as an individual	33	4.27 (.76)
26	Take time to get to know their students	33	4.33 (.54)
28	Make me feel like I belong there	33	4.42 (.66)
37	Set high expectations and want me to do well in class	32	4.50 (.62)
38	Believe that I am smart and can learn	32	4.44 (.76)
48	Feel that my teachers treat all students fairly when it comes to discipline	32	3.78 (1.24)
<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>		33	4.24 (.45)

Table 5

*African American Students' Negative Beliefs Toward Teachers Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)
3	Do not understand my teachers and they do not understand me	32	4.03 (1.23)
11	Do not learn anything in class	33	4.75 (.50)
31	Do not teach me anything	33	4.67 (.54)
35	Just give me a grade to pass me to the next grade	32	4.28 (.99)
39	Talk down to me as if I am not smart	33	4.58 (.56)
40	Embarrass me in front of other students	32	4.13 (.91)
41	Think I am not smart enough to be in school	33	4.82 (.39)
45	Feel my teachers unfairly give me discipline referrals for no reason	33	4.18 (1.01)
47	Feel my teachers are always calling on me or accusing me for something that I did not do	33	4.06 (1.06)
49	Feel that teachers are too hard when it comes to discipline	32	3.53 (1.14)
50	Feel that teachers give more disciplinary actions to African American students	32	4.56 (.62)
51	Feel that teachers are giving me a lot of disciplinary actions because they do not like me	33	4.49 (.80)
52	Believe that teachers would rather write up a student so he or she can be expelled	33	4.46 (1.03)
<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>		33	4.35 (.47)

Table 6

*Items Not Included in Subscales Due to Low Reliability*


---

#	Item
6	Feel that students pick at other students for making good grades
7	Allow my friends to tell me what to do
8	Really care about what my friends think of me
9	Experience a lot of peer pressure from my friends
16	Want to go into easier classes because the work is too difficult
17	Am not being challenged to learn
18	Am in a class with other students who are not smart
21	Like when my teachers give me group work
22	Do not like to participate in class assignments
27	Always correct me when I speak incorrectly
29	Treat all students fairly
30	Encourage African American students to learn
32	Give me a lot of homework
33	Encourage African American students to be in gifted and talented classes
34	Are willing to help me learn by coming early to school or staying after school
36	Challenge me to do well in school
43	Am always getting into trouble at school
46	Feel I do not deserve to receive disciplinary action(s)

---

grades. There were two items used to address this factor, #10 “Study and earn good grades because it is important to me” and #35 “Just give me a grade to pass me to the next grade.” There were 31 ( $N = 33$ ) African American students (94%) who believed that they “earned good grades.” There was one African American student (3%) who believed that he/she did not “earn good grades” and one African American student (3%) responded by selecting the “neutral” choice.

There were 27 ( $N = 32$ ) African Americans (84%) who believed that their teachers did not simply give them a grade to pass them to the next grade. On the other hand, there were two African Americans (6%) who believed that their teachers gave grades so they can pass to the next grade. Three African American (10%) students responded neutrally.

#### African American Students' Beliefs Toward Teachers

African American students' positive beliefs toward teachers yielded similar means. Honor roll students' ( $N = 17$ ) positive beliefs toward their teachers had a mean of 4.28 ( $SD = .45$ ) and non-honor roll students' ( $N = 16$ ) positive beliefs toward teachers had a mean of 4.20 ( $SD = .45$ ). African American students' negative beliefs toward teachers' variable revealed a similar pattern as their positive beliefs toward teachers' variable. A stronger negative beliefs toward teachers mean demonstrates that these students have more of a negative attitude or beliefs toward their teachers. African American students' had a mean of 4.35 ( $SD = .47$ ). African American honor roll students' ( $N = 17$ ) negative beliefs toward teachers had a mean of 4.48 ( $SD = .33$ ), which yielded a stronger negative beliefs mean compared to the other means. The mean for the non-honor roll students' negative beliefs toward teachers were lower compared to the

honor roll students. In the non-honor roll group, African Americans ( $N = 16$ ) had a mean of 4.21 ( $SD = .55$ ).

#### African American Students and Discipline Referrals

A large percentage of African American students did not receive any discipline referrals for the entire school year. Since the number of discipline referrals administered to students had low variability, the researcher recoded the discipline referral variable into a different variable called “behavior.” Students receiving no discipline referrals = 0, 1 discipline referral = 1, 2 or more discipline referrals = 2. There were 25 ( $N = 34$ ) African Americans (73%) who did not receive any discipline referrals. Five African Americans (15%) accounted for at least one discipline referral and four African American students (12%) received two or more discipline referrals (see Table 7).

Students were asked to respond to a questionnaire item regarding their beliefs toward receiving discipline referrals. Students’ responses to item #45 “Feel my teachers unfairly give me discipline referrals for no reason” were analyzed to address this matter. There were three ( $N = 33$ ) African Americans (9%) who believed that their teachers gave them discipline referrals for no reason. On the other hand, 25 African Americans (76%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement regarding their “teachers unfairly gave them discipline referrals for no reason.” There were five (15%) African American students that responded by selecting “neutral.” Overall, the majority of students did not “feel as if their teachers unfairly gave them discipline referrals for no reason.”

Item #46 “Feel I do not deserve to receive disciplinary action(s)” was recoded with a range from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 =

Table 7

*African American Students' Discipline Referrals*

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Number of Discipline Referrals	N	Percent (%)
0	25	73.5
1	5	14.7
2	2	5.9
3	1	2.9
4	0	0
10	1	2.9

---

strongly agree responses. There were five ( $N = 33$ ) African American (15%) students who perceived that they did not deserve to receive disciplinary action(s). On the other hand, there were 16 African American (49%) students who believed that they deserved to receive disciplinary action(s). Approximately one-third of students, 12 African American (36%) students, selected “neutral” as an answer choice.

The researcher analyzed students’ beliefs regarding whether or not their teachers treated students fairly based on responses provided for item #48 “Feel that my teachers treat all students fairly when it comes to discipline.” There were 20 ( $N = 32$ ) African American (63%) students who indicated that their teachers treated all students fairly when it came to discipline. On the other hand, five African American (16%) students indicated that their teachers did not fairly treat students equally regarding discipline. There were seven African American (21%) students who selected “neutral” as a response.

The researcher also investigated an item that ask students about their feelings regarding discipline actions among African American students, which was #50 “Feel that teachers give more disciplinary actions to African American student.” There were 30 ( $N = 32$ ) African American (94%) students who perceived that their teachers did not give more disciplinary actions to African American students. On the other hand, no African American students perceived that their teachers gave more disciplinary actions to African American students. Two African American (6%) students responded by selecting “neutral.”

#### Analyses of Research Questions

Research Question 1. A Pearson correlation was employed to analyze the data to determine if there was a correlation between African American students’ self-beliefs and

their composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. This research question demonstrated no significant correlations between African American students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades (see Table 8).

Research Question 2. The researcher used the “positive beliefs toward teachers” and “negative beliefs toward teachers” variables to determine whether or not correlations existed between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and their composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. This research question demonstrated no significant correlations existed between African American students positive and negative beliefs toward their teachers and composite report card grades (see Table 9).

Research Question 3. Since the discipline referrals variable was non-normally distributed, the researcher employed Spearman's correlation to analyze whether or not there were significant relationships between African American students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals received. This research question demonstrated that a negative significant relationship existed between African American students' self-beliefs and discipline referrals received,  $r_s = -.450, p < .01$  (2-tailed). The inverse relationship demonstrated that as African American students' value on self-beliefs increased, the frequency of discipline referrals decreased.

Research Question 4. Spearman's correlations were used to analyze whether there were any relationships between African American students' beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals they received. Table 10 displays a negative relationship between African American students' positive beliefs toward their teachers and discipline



Table 8

*Correlations of African American Students' Self-Beliefs and Report Card Grades*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Language Arts	1				
Mathematics	.826*	1			
Science	.670*	.866*	1		
Social Studies	.680*	.789*	.833*	1	
Self-Beliefs	.008	.064	-.033	-.133	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 9

*Correlations of African American Students' Beliefs Toward Their Teachers and Report Card Grades*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Language Arts	1					
Mathematics	.826*	1				
Science	.670*	.866*	1			
Social Studies	.680*	.789*	.833*	1		
Positive Beliefs	.012	.060	-.083	-.238	1	
Negative Beliefs	.143	.211	.125	.052	.538*	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 10

*Correlations of African American Students' Beliefs Toward Their Teachers and Discipline Referrals Received*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Discipline Referrals Received	1		
Positive Beliefs	-.394*	1	
Negative Beliefs	-.312	.510*	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

referrals received,  $r_s = -.394, p < .01$  (2-tailed). Additionally, there were no significant correlations between African American students' negative beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals received.

Research Question 5: The researcher was not able to test this research question due to the low reliability of a stereotype threat subscale. The items that were developed to measure stereotype threat did not highly correlate with one another. Therefore, the researcher was unable to calculate a score with an acceptable reliability.

#### Ancillary Analyses

As an ethical research practice, data that have been collected should not be discarded. Therefore, after analyzing the data and addressing the hypotheses of the study, the researcher analyzed the data collected on Caucasian students. The same descriptive analyses applied to the data collected on African American students were also applied to the data on Caucasian students. Hence, the tables contained in this section are comparisons between African American and Caucasian students. The researcher employed independent sample *t*-tests to determine whether or not there were any significant differences between the groups' means. In addition, the researcher also analyzed the data in a manner consistent with the hypotheses of the study.

The primary component of the analyses contains general descriptive data in which the data for African American students are contrasted with the comparable results for Caucasian students. The first descriptive analysis relates to African American ( $N = 34$ ) and Caucasian ( $N = 65$ ) students' attendance record, which is found in Table 11. It includes the range, mean, and SD of students' absenteeism and tardiness. Although there

Table 11

*Descriptive Statistics of African American and Caucasian Students' Frequency of Absenteeism and Tardiness*

	N	Ethnicity	Range	Mean	SD
Absent	34	African American	0-24	2.62	5.03
	65	Caucasian	0-20	4.48	4.70
Tardy	34	African American	0-18	2.85	4.49
	65	Caucasian	0-14	1.15	2.55

was not a significant difference for absenteeism,  $t(97) = -1.83, p > .05$ , there was a significant difference for tardiness,  $t(97) = 2.41, p = .01$ .

The second descriptive analysis contains African American and Caucasian students' end-of-year report card grades from the four core subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (see Table 12). There were 17 African American students (50%) compared to 48 Caucasian students (75%) who earned average grades of B or higher (greater than a numerical grade of 85). Caucasian students ( $N = 64$ ) did not include data for social studies for one student, yielding  $N = 63$ . There were no statistically significant differences between African American and Caucasian students' means for language arts ( $t(96) = -1.18, p = .05$ ), mathematics ( $t(96) = -2.09, p > .05$ ), science ( $t(96) = -3.21, p > .05$ ), and social studies ( $t(95) = -2.17, p > .05$ ). Similar to the findings for African American students, there were no Caucasian students retained at grade level. There was one African American (3%) compared to three Caucasian (5%) students who were required to attend summer school for failing one or more core subjects.

There were three subscales derived based on Caucasian students' responses regarding self-beliefs, positive beliefs toward teachers, and negative beliefs toward teachers. These subscales are identical for African American students. The subscales were created by computing the means of students' response to each item. Table 13 contains the means and SD for each item contained on the African American and Caucasian students' self-beliefs subscale. There was not a statistically significant difference,  $t(95) = .40, p > .05$ , between African American and Caucasian students' self-beliefs subscale. Table 14 contains the means and SD for each item contained on the

Table 12

*African American and Caucasian Students' End-of-Year Report Card Grades*

Subject Area	N	Ethnicity	Range	Mean	SD
Language Arts	34	African American	61-99	86.97	7.20
	64	Caucasian	67-100	88.86	7.69
Mathematics	34	African American	68-100	85.06	8.05
	64	Caucasian	67-99	88.52	7.66
Science	34	African American	73-99	85.97	7.39
	64	Caucasian	73-100	90.41	6.01
Social Studies	34	African American	68-99	85.44	7.99
	63	Caucasian	71-100	88.86	7.08
<i>Average</i>	34	African American	69.25-99.25	85.86	7.00
	64	Caucasian	72.25-99.75	89.18	6.47

Table 13

*African American and Caucasian Students' Self-Beliefs Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)			
			African American		Caucasian	
1	Enjoy going to school and learning new things	33	4.27	(.63)	64	4.27 (.80)
2	Get along with all of my teachers	33	4.36	(.74)	63	4.37 (.92)
10	Study and earn good grades because it is important to me	33	4.48	(.71)	64	4.47 (.78)
12	Am in the right classes that challenge me to learn	31	4.26	(.73)	62	4.16 (.98)
13	Am in classes with other students that have the same ability level	33	3.39	(.86)	64	3.22 (1.15)
14	Am in the smart class	32	3.63	(1.07)	63	3.81 (1.11)
15	Should be in gifted and talented classes so I can learn more	32	3.78	(1.21)	64	3.75 (1.11)
19	Belong in a higher class because I am smart	33	3.12	(1.24)	64	3.06 (1.10)
20	Like doing with other students	33	4.09	(.84)	64	4.11 (.91)
23	Raise my hand in class and ask questions	33	3.97	(.95)	64	3.95 (.90)



42	Do not get into any trouble at						
	school	33	3.52	(1.12)	64	3.42	(1.11)
44	Feel bad when I do get into trouble						
	at school	33	3.97	(1.08)	63	3.76	(1.04)
	<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>	33	3.90	(.47)	64	3.86	(.50)

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Table 14

*African American and Caucasian Students' Positive Beliefs Toward Teachers Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)			
			African American		Caucasian	
2	Get along with all of my teachers	33	4.36	(.74)	63	4.37 (.92)
4	Am comfortable asking my teachers					
	for help with my homework	33	4.03	(.85)	64	3.95 (1.00)
5	Like all of my teachers and feel as					
	if I can talk to them about anything	33	4.00	(1.06)	64	3.80 (1.12)
25	Respect and care about me as an					
	individual	33	4.27	(.76)	64	4.36 (.78)
26	Take time to get to know their					
	students	33	4.33	(.54)	63	4.22 (.92)
28	Make me feel like I belong there	33	4.42	(.66)	62	4.19 (.85)
37	Set high expectations and want me					
	to do well in class	32	4.50	(.62)	64	4.34 (.96)
38	Believe that I am smart and can					
	learn	32	4.44	(.76)	62	4.60 (.61)
48	Feel that my teachers treat all students					
	fairly when it comes to discipline	32	3.78	(1.24)	64	3.70 (1.03)
<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>		33	4.24	(.45)	64	4.17 (.54)

African American and Caucasian students' positive beliefs toward teachers subscale.

Based on the findings derived from an independent sample *t*-test, African American and Caucasian students' positive beliefs subscale was not statistically significant,  $t(95) = .66$ ,  $p > .05$ . Table 15 contains the means and SD for each item contained on the African American and Caucasian students' negative beliefs toward teachers subscale. There was no statistically significant difference,  $t(95) = 1.26$ ,  $p > .05$ , between African American and Caucasian students' negative beliefs subscale.

#### *Caucasian Students' Self-Beliefs*

There were 57 (N = 64) Caucasian students (89%) who believed that they "earned good grades." On the other hand, there were two Caucasian students (3%) who believed that he/she did not "earn good grades." Five Caucasian (7.8%) students responded by selecting the "neutral" choice. There were 46 (N = 64) Caucasians (72%) who believed that their teachers did not simply give them a grade to pass them to the next grade. On the other hand, there were nine Caucasians (14%) who believed that their teachers gave grades so they can pass to the next grade. Nine Caucasian (14%) students responded neutrally.

Although higher percentage of African American (94%) compared to Caucasian (89%) students believed they "earned good grades," the differences in these self-beliefs was not statistically significant,  $t(95) = .10$ ,  $p > .05$ . Additionally, there was a higher percentage of African American (84%) compared to Caucasian (72%) students who believed that their teachers did not simply give them a grade to pass them to the next grade. Again, this difference was not statistically significant,  $t(94) = -.81$ ,  $p > .09$ .

Table 15

*African American and Caucasian Students' Negative Beliefs Toward Teachers Subscale*

#	Item	N	Means (SD)			
			African American		Caucasian	
3	Do not understand my teachers and they do not understand me	32	4.03	(1.23)	62	4.37 (.95)
11	Do not learn anything in class	33	4.75	(.50)	63	4.76 (.59)
31	Do not teach me anything	33	4.67	(.54)	64	4.44 (1.07)
35	Just give me a grade to pass me to the next grade	32	4.28	(.99)	64	4.08 (1.23)
39	Talk down to me as if I am not smart	33	4.58	(.56)	62	4.23 (1.15)
40	Embarrass me in front of other students	32	4.13	(.91)	62	4.10 (1.10)
41	Think I am not smart enough to be in school	33	4.82	(.39)	63	4.38 (1.20)
45	Feel my teachers unfairly give me discipline referrals for no reason	33	4.18	(1.01)	63	4.02 (1.31)
47	Feel my teachers are always calling on me or accusing me for something that I did not do	33	4.06	(1.06)	63	3.73 (1.42)

49	Feel that teachers are too hard when it comes to discipline	32	3.53	(1.14)	63	3.49	(1.06)
50	Feel that teachers give more disciplinary actions to African American students	32	4.56	(.62)	64	4.05	(1.12)
51	Feel that teachers are giving me a lot of disciplinary actions because they do not like me	33	4.49	(.80)	64	4.44	(.87)
52	Believe that teachers would rather write up a student so he or she can be expelled	33	4.46	(1.03)	64	4.30	(1.09)
<i>Overall Subscale Means</i>		33	4.35	(.47)	64	4.18	(.67)

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### *Caucasian Students' Beliefs Toward Teachers*

Caucasian students had a mean of 4.17 (SD = .54) regarding a positive beliefs toward teachers. For Caucasian honor roll students' (N = 48) positive beliefs toward their teachers, the mean was 4.22 (SD = .54), which is somewhat lower than that of African American students' mean of 4.28 (SD = .45). There was no statistically significant difference,  $t(63) = .36, p > .05$ , between Caucasian and African American honor roll students' positive beliefs toward teachers. On the other hand, Caucasian non-honor roll students' (N = 15) positive beliefs toward teachers yielded a lower mean of 4.03 (SD = .54) which is also lower than that of African American students' mean of 4.20 (SD = .45). Again, there was no statistically significant difference,  $t(29) = .91, p > .05$ , between the groups' means.

The negative beliefs toward teachers' variable revealed a similar mean as the positive beliefs toward teachers' variable. Caucasian students had a mean of 4.18 (SD = .67). Caucasian honor roll students' (N = 48) negative beliefs toward teachers had a mean of 4.26 (SD = .71) compared to African American students' mean of 4.48 (SD = .33) and was found to be statistically significant,  $t(63) = 1.22, p = .01$ . The difference in means demonstrates that African American students had somewhat more of a negative attitude or negative beliefs toward their teachers compared to Caucasian students. The means for Caucasian non-honor roll students' (N = 15) negative beliefs toward teachers were lower compared to the honor roll students at a mean of 3.96 (SD = .49). In comparison, African American non-honor roll students' (N = 16) mean of 4.21 (SD = .55) was higher than that of Caucasian students, but it was not statistically significant,  $t(29) = 1.31, p > .05$ .

### *Caucasian Students and Discipline Referrals*

A larger percentage (88%) of Caucasian students, 57 (N = 65), did not receive any discipline referrals for the entire school year compared to African American students (73%). The findings derived from the *t*-test demonstrated a statistically significant difference,  $t(97) = 1.58, p = .007$ , between African American and Caucasian students receiving discipline referrals. There were four Caucasian students (6%) who received only one discipline referral and four Caucasian students (6%) who received two or more discipline referrals (see Table 16). There were a small number of Caucasian students who believed that their teachers unfairly gave them discipline referrals. There were 9 (N = 63) Caucasian students (14%) who believed that their teachers gave them discipline referrals for no reason. On the other hand, 49 Caucasians (78%) either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement regarding their “teachers unfairly gave them discipline referrals for no reason.” There were five (8%) Caucasian students that responded by selecting “neutral.” Overall, the majority of Caucasian students did not “feel as if their teachers unfairly gave them discipline referrals for no reason.”

There were 14 (N = 63) Caucasian (22%) students who believed that they did not deserve to receive disciplinary action(s) compared to a lower percentage of African American (15%) students. On the other hand, there were 32 Caucasian (51%) students who perceived that they deserved to receive disciplinary action(s), which is fairly comparable to the percentage for African American (49%) students. There were 17 Caucasian students (27%) who selected “neutral” as an answer choice. The difference in the groups’ means regarding whether or not students’ perceived they deserved to receive discipline action(s) was not statistically significant,  $t(94) = .31, p > .05$ .

Table 16

*African American and Caucasian Students' Discipline Referrals*

Number of Discipline Referrals	N (Percent)			
	African American		Caucasian	
0	25	(73.5)	57	(87.7)
1	5	(14.7)	4	(6.2)
2	2	(5.9)	1	(1.5)
3	1	(2.9)	1	(1.5)
4	0	(0)	2	(3.1)
10	1	(2.9)	0	(0)



The researcher analyzed Caucasian students' beliefs regarding whether or not their teachers equally treated students fairly when it came to discipline. There were 34 (N = 64) Caucasian (53%) students who indicated that their teachers treated all students fairly when it came to discipline. On the other hand, five (8%) Caucasian students indicated that their teachers did not fairly treat students equally regarding discipline. There were 25 Caucasian (39%) students who selected "neutral" as a response. There was no statistically significant difference,  $t(94) = .33, p > .05$ , between African American and Caucasian students' beliefs regarding whether or not teachers treated students fairly when it came to discipline. Additionally, the researcher was also interested in an item that ask students about their feelings regarding discipline actions specifically administered to African American students. There were 44 (N = 64) Caucasian students (69%) who believed that their teachers did not give more disciplinary actions to African American students compared to 30 (N = 32) African American students (94%). On the other hand, there were six Caucasian (9%) students who believed that their teachers gave more disciplinary actions to African American students. There were 14 Caucasians (22%) who responded by selecting "neutral." Based on an independent sample  $t$ -test, there was a statistically significant difference,  $t(94) = -2.42, p = .002$ , between African American and Caucasian students' beliefs regarding whether or not teachers gave more disciplinary actions to African American students.

#### *Analyses of Ancillary Data within the Context of the Original Research Questions*

Research Question 1. A Pearson correlation was employed to analyze the data to determine if there was a correlation between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

This research question demonstrated no significant correlations between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades as shown in Table 17. In comparison, African American students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades also demonstrated no significant correlations.

Research Question 2. The researcher used the "positive beliefs toward teachers" and "negative beliefs toward teachers" variables to determine whether or not correlations existed between Caucasian students' beliefs about their teachers and their composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. This research question demonstrated there were no significant correlations existed between Caucasian students positive beliefs toward their teachers and composite report card grades (see Table 18). Similarly, African American students' positive beliefs toward their teachers and composite report card grades demonstrated no significant correlations. On the other hand, Caucasian students had one significant correlation between negative beliefs toward their teachers and language arts grade,  $r = .254, p < .01$  (2-tailed). Unlike the significant correlation reported for Caucasian students, there was no significant correlation between African American students' negative beliefs toward their teachers and composite report card grades.

Research Question 3. Spearman's correlation was employed to analyze whether or not there were significant relationships between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals received. This research question demonstrated that a positive significant correlation existed between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals received,  $r_s = .368, p < .01$  (2-tailed). On the other hand,

Table 17

*Correlations of Caucasian Students' Self-Beliefs and Report Card Grades*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Language Arts	1				
Mathematics	.673*	1			
Science	.844*	.744*	1		
Social Studies	.838*	.721*	.844*	1	
Self-Beliefs	.099	.047	.020	.066	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 18

*Correlations of Caucasian Students' Beliefs Toward Their Teachers and Report Card**Grades*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Language Arts	1					
Mathematics	.673*	1				
Science	.844*	.744*	1			
Social Studies	.838*	.721*	.844*	1		
Positive Beliefs	.118	.081	.082	.078	1	
Negative Beliefs	.254*	.161	.235	.168	.507*	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

African American students' self-beliefs and the number of disciplinary referrals received had a negative significant correlation.

Research Question 4. Spearman's correlations were used to analyze whether there were any relationships between Caucasian students' beliefs about their teachers and the number of discipline referrals they received. According to Table 19, there were no significant correlations between Caucasian students' positive and negative beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals received. Similarly, there were no significant correlations between African American students' negative beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals received. On the other hand, there was a negative significant correlation between African American students' positive beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals received.

Research Question 5: The researcher was not able to test this research question due to the low reliability of a stereotype threat subscale. The items that were developed to measure stereotype threat did not highly correlate with one another. Therefore, the researcher was unable to calculate a score with an acceptable reliability.

### Summary

Chapter IV provided the descriptive and comparative findings based on the research questions and hypotheses for African American students. The researcher obtained archival data (gender; ethnicity; composite report card grades in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; attendance record; and discipline referrals) and data collected from students' responses to a 52-item survey. There were three sub-scales: students' positive beliefs toward their teachers, students' negative beliefs toward their

Table 19

*Correlations of Caucasian Students' Beliefs and Discipline Referrals Received*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Discipline Referrals Received	1		
Positive Beliefs	.216	1	
Negative Beliefs	.128	.549*	1

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

teachers, and students' self-beliefs. Each subscale generated a reasonable Cronbach's alpha, which means the instrument had an acceptable level of reliability.

Based on his own ethical considerations, the researcher determined that it was inappropriate to administer the survey instrument only to African American students. He further determined that there was an obligation to not discard any data that were collected in this study. Therefore, the researcher provided the descriptive and comparative findings regarding the data collected on Caucasian students in the latter portion of this chapter. There were several key findings described in this chapter that are discussed in greater details in the following Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to discuss the descriptive and comparative findings that were presented in the Chapter IV. A quantitative study was conducted using archival data and responses derived from a survey instrument specifically created to address students' self-beliefs and beliefs about their teachers regarding academic and disciplinary factors. The sample included 99 students, 34 African Americans and 65 Caucasians, from seven schools within a southeastern public school district. This chapter also contains the limitations of the research, policy implications and recommendations for future research.

#### Interpretation of the Findings

The researcher explored four hypotheses related to African American students' self-beliefs and beliefs about their teachers in relation to the academic achievement and discipline referrals. There were no statistically significant relationships between African American students' (1) self-beliefs and composite report card grades; (2) positive beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades; and (3) negative beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant correlation between African American students' self-beliefs and discipline referrals. There was also a statistically significant correlation between African American students' positive beliefs about their teachers and discipline referrals. In contrast, there were no statistically significant relationship between African American students' negative beliefs about their teachers and discipline referrals.



The students' self-beliefs subscale was created in order to address the research question regarding whether or not students believed they "earned" or "were given" academic grades. Two items found on the questionnaire, #10 "Study and earn good grades because it is important to me" and #35 "Just give me a grade to pass me to the next grade" were analyzed to address the first research question. According to the findings, the majority of African American students' beliefs indicated the importance of studying to earn good grades which lends support to the theoretical framework of the research study. Based on Crawford's (2002) study, students "self-worth" was highly related to their academic achievement. African American students' beliefs regarding the importance of studying to earn good grades also demonstrated support that students' basic physiological needs were met (Arkes & Garske, 1977; Cofer & Appley, 1964). Teachers have a direct impact on African American students' self-beliefs regarding education attainment (Honora, 2003), which also supported Howard's (2002) qualitative study on teachers' critical role of helping students to realize the importance of academic achievement. Furthermore, it demonstrated that these students' high motivation to succeed in the classroom may have been contributed to their ability of being able to identify with their school culture (Honora, 2003).

Although African American students' self-beliefs regarding studying and earning good grades were supported by some portions of the literature, it did not lend support to the stereotype threat theory (Steele, 1998). The African American students in this study did not confirm the negative stereotype against their race, such as not studying and valuing the importance of earning good grades. This finding also contradicts the notion that African American students equate being intelligent and studious as attempting to be

of the Caucasian race (Viadero & Johnston, 2000). In other words, some African American students would rather choose not to study than to be ostracized by their peers. In the current study, African American students' self-beliefs regarding academic achievement demonstrated that these students may have not encountered this dilemma. On the other hand, if the sample had also included students with lower grade point averages and increasing incidents of disciplinary referrals, the results might have demonstrated some degree of stereotype threat.

African American students had a slightly lower mean regarding their self-beliefs and whether or not their teachers just gave them grades to pass to the next grade compared to earning grades. This finding indicated a large majority of African American students believed they "earned" rather than "were given" grades which could be contributed to teacher support (Honora, 2003). Honora suggested teachers have a direct impact in shaping African American students' beliefs toward learning and identifying with the school culture.

Based on the researcher's examination of the literature, and further informed by significant professional experience, it appears to be the case that younger students generally seek to please their teachers. As reported in the results, the researcher expected a large majority of students to state their beliefs that they had earned, as opposed to were given, good grades to pass to the next grade. Since students were only permitted to participate in the study with active parental consent, and generalizing this level of parent involvement to other educational matters, the researcher concluded that these students also study to earn good grades because of parental involvement. Additionally, in support of the study's theoretical framework regarding teachers meeting students' basic

physiological needs, parents also play a critical role in meeting their children's physiological needs. Students living in environments in which parents provide nurturing care and support tend to thrive academically and socially.

After analyzing African American students' self-beliefs regarding composite report card grades, the researcher analyzed students' beliefs about their teachers and composite report card grades. There were similarities between students' self-beliefs and their composite report card grades relative to African American students' beliefs about their teachers and composite report card grades. African American students' beliefs about teachers were divided into subscales: students' positive beliefs toward teachers and students' negative beliefs toward teachers. African American students had a slightly lower group mean regarding positive beliefs toward their teachers compared to the negative beliefs toward their teachers.

In another analysis, the researcher divided the students into two groups based on the overall end of the year cumulative grade average ('B' and higher versus 'C' and below). African American students who received a grade average of 'B' or higher demonstrated a slightly higher group mean compared to African American students who received a 'C' and below average. Overall, African American students demonstrated positive beliefs toward teachers. Based on the overall grades earned by African American students in this study, it confirmed Taylor's (2006) qualitative study regarding African American students' perceptions of their teachers of not caring whether or not they completed their assignments. Taylor found that when African American students believed their teachers had low expectations regarding their academic abilities, then these students were more likely not to do well in the classroom. In the current study, the researcher

suggested the differences in beliefs between African American students in the 'B' or higher group versus 'C' or lower group appeared that students who achieved higher grades also had higher group mean for the positive beliefs about teachers variable. Additionally, the group of students' who had 'C' or lower grade averages had lower positive beliefs toward teachers.

Based on the researcher's examination of the literature, again seasoned by professional experience, it was concluded that students who earned higher grades tend to have more of an optimistic attitude toward their teachers as opposed to students who earned lower grades. Additionally, these students' favorable attitudes help to shape their views toward completing and doing well on assignments. On the other hand, students who earned lower grades may believe that their teachers do not like them; which they believe in part to be among the reasons they earn lower grades. Students' negative beliefs regarding their teachers tend to yield to negative academic and behavioral outcomes that are detrimental to students' future classroom success.

The researcher found similarities between students' negative beliefs subscale and students' positive beliefs subscale. African American students who received a 'B' or higher average had a higher mean for negative beliefs toward their teachers compared to African American students who had a 'C' or lower average. The researcher asserts African American students' stronger negative beliefs toward their teachers may be contributed to African American students' experience in the classroom. According to a quantitative study regarding African American students' experience with their teachers, Casteel (2000) found that approximately two-third of students believed their teachers did not "praise them" enough in the classroom. In the current study, African American

students may have developed their negative beliefs toward their teachers based on their interaction and treatment.

Although the finding regarding African American students' negative beliefs toward their teachers and composite grades seem somewhat contradictory, the researcher concluded that students who earned a 'B' average or higher may believe their teachers do not provide ample positive feedback. In other words, when African American students do well in the classroom, teachers may have a tendency not to reinforce students' positive outcome. On the other hand, teachers may provide African American students who earned a 'C' or lower averages with more individualized attention and feedback as a result of their greater difficulty in mastering academic content.

After analyzing students' self-beliefs and beliefs about their teachers in relation to composite report card grades, the researcher analyzed students' self-beliefs, students' beliefs about their teachers, and discipline referrals. Based on Spearman's correlation analyses, there were statistically significant relationships. There was a negative significant relationship between African American students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals received. This means that as African American students' self-beliefs improve or increase, the likelihood of receiving discipline referrals tends to decrease. Likewise, as African American students' self-beliefs decrease, the chances of receiving discipline referrals tend to increase. The findings demonstrated support to the theoretical framework regarding Maslow's Hierarchy of Need; teachers met the physiological needs of students (Arkes & Garske, 1977). In return, students developed motivation and determination to excel in the classroom and were less likely to receive discipline referrals. In the current study, African American students experienced a sense

of belongingness and self-worth which lends support to Crawford's (2002) study. Based on these students' self-beliefs and discipline referrals, they were less likely to engage in negative behavior that would result in disciplinary referrals. This finding counters some of the literature regarding African American students received a greater number of disciplinary referrals (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006).

Based on the researcher's examination of the literature and pertinent classroom experience, it was asserted that African Americans who had higher self-beliefs or higher self-esteem tend to do well in the classroom and avoid receiving disciplinary referrals. On the other hand, students who had lower self-beliefs or lower self-esteem tend to seek attention by misbehaving and 'acting out.' As a result of their lack of classroom decorum, these students tend to receive more disciplinary referrals for their misconduct. Students who were disciplined were more likely to be absent from classroom instructions; hence, they received lower composite grades. While the number of students earning low grades was not sufficient to provide for adequate analysis of such a supposition, the researcher believes that there is a positive correlation between earning lower composite grades and receiving disciplinary referrals.

The researcher also found similar results between African American students' positive beliefs of teachers and discipline referrals received. The students' positive and negative beliefs about their teachers and discipline referrals received were also analyzed using Spearman's correlation coefficients. There was a negative relationship between African American students' positive beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals. In other words, as African American students' positive beliefs toward their teachers increase, the number of discipline referrals received decrease. This finding reported

contradictory results compared to the students at Berkeley High School, where 70% of African American students received disciplinary referrals (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). In the current study, the researcher suggested that teachers were able to relate to African American students' traditions and social styles. On the contrast, Gregory and Mosely (2004) stated that African American students were more likely to receive discipline referrals because they were misunderstood. Additionally, there were no statistically significant correlations between African American students' negative beliefs and discipline referrals received.

The finding regarding African American students' positive beliefs and disciplinary referrals is consistent with the literature and the researcher's professional experience. Teachers help to shape students' optimistic beliefs through positive classroom experience. When students develop favorable beliefs and opinions about their teachers, they are less likely to receive disciplinary referrals. As a result, they tend to earn higher composite grade averages.

#### Interpretation of the Ancillary Findings

The researcher also reported findings for the data collected on Caucasian students. There were no statistically significant relationships for Caucasian students' (1) self-beliefs and composite report card grades and (2) positive beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades. These results were similar to the findings reported for African American students. On the other hand, there was a correlation between Caucasian students' negative beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades. Unlike Caucasian students, there was no statistically significant correlation between African American students' negative beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades.

Caucasian students' responses regarding their self-beliefs and whether or not their teachers just gave them grades to pass to the next grade reported that the majority of these students believed they earned their grades opposed to were given grades. Similar to the findings reported for African American students, Caucasian students' positive beliefs toward teachers were higher for students who earned a 'B' average or better compared to students who earned a 'C' average or lower. The mean rating of Caucasian students' negative beliefs toward teachers was lower than the positive beliefs toward teachers.

After exploring students' self-beliefs and beliefs regarding grades, the researcher examined students' self-beliefs and beliefs regarding disciplinary referrals. There was a statistically significant correlation between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and discipline referrals, which is similar to the findings for African American students. In contrast, there were no statistically significant relationships between Caucasians students' beliefs (positive and negative) toward their teachers and composite report card grades. Similar to the findings reported for Caucasian students, there was no statistically significant correlation between African American students' negative beliefs about their teachers and composite report card grades. On the other hand, there was a statistically significant correlation between African American students' positive beliefs toward teachers and discipline referrals.

Based on the review of literature and the professional experience of the researcher, it was concluded that younger students tend to have higher self-beliefs which result in lower disciplinary referrals. In the current study, the researcher found that African American and Caucasian students demonstrated higher self-beliefs and hence, fewer disciplinary referrals. The researcher expected to find a difference between both



groups of students and negative beliefs toward their teachers. The lack of significant correlation may be attributed to students' unwillingness to report negative beliefs about their teachers, since the teachers remained in the classrooms during the administration of the surveys. On the other hand, the researcher expected to find a statistically significant correlation between African American students' and positive beliefs toward their teachers. The researcher concluded that African American students' high self-beliefs contributed to these students' positive beliefs toward their teachers and lower number of disciplinary referrals, consistent with the findings of Ware (2006).

A majority of African American and Caucasian students reported that their teachers did not unfairly, nor for lack of justification, administer disciplinary referrals. Based on the students' responses, the researcher assumed that many of these students may have believed that their teachers treated all students fairly when it came to disciplinary referrals. However, the researcher did not anticipate the statistically significant findings relative to students' responses regarding whether or not teachers gave more disciplinary referrals to African American students. Based on prior literature, the researcher expected that a higher proportion of African American students compared to Caucasian students would report that teachers gave more disciplinary referrals to African American students (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Skiba et al., 2002). Caucasian students may have reported that more African American students received disciplinary referrals based on their perceptions and prior classroom experience of African American students as a whole. Additionally, prior literature has demonstrated that the media depicts African Americans as being out of control and threatening (Monroe, 2005a). Therefore, Caucasian students may have believed that African American students were more likely

to receive disciplinary referrals based on their media experience. On the other hand, African American students may have answered this question based on their personal experiences as opposed to those of all African American students receiving disciplinary referrals.

Consistent with the conclusions of authors like Gregory, Nygreen, and Moran (2006), Noguera and Wing (2006), Skiba et al. (2002), the researcher found that African American students received a significantly higher number of disciplinary referrals than Caucasian students. Interestingly, there was a positive relationship between Caucasian students' self-beliefs and the number of discipline referrals they received. The researcher assumes that some students who were from higher socioeconomic status levels and who had high self-beliefs may believe that they were somewhat invincible. This could have resulted in their demonstrating disrespect to their teachers. In contrast, African American students' self-beliefs and discipline referrals received demonstrated a negative statistically significant correlation as opposed to a positive relationship. This finding is more consistent with the literature.

There was no statistically significant correlation between Caucasian students' positive beliefs and discipline referrals. This correlation is contrary to the findings reported for African American students where an inverse relationship exists between positive beliefs and discipline referrals. On the other hand, Caucasian students' negative beliefs toward their teachers and discipline referrals received were found not to have a statistically significant correlation; which is similar to the finding for African American students. Based on the literature and the researcher's professional experience, it was assumed that students who generally have positive beliefs about their teachers tend not to

engage in negative behaviors that would result in receiving disciplinary referrals.

Furthermore, students who displayed negative beliefs and attitudes about teachers generally received more disciplinary referrals.

### Limitations

The aim of this research was to determine if there is a relationship between students' beliefs and academic outcomes. The researcher's primary focus was an analysis of significant relationships between African American students' beliefs of teachers and academic outcomes. Additionally, there was an analysis of significant relationships between African American students' beliefs of teachers to discipline referrals. The researcher gathered archival data and students' responses on a questionnaire specifically designed for this research study. Based on the latter method of collecting students' data, the researcher believes there were several factors that may have limited the scope of this research.

First of all, students were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their self-beliefs and beliefs about their current academic school setting and teacher. The sample of students was all in fifth grade and in an inclusion classroom setting or in one that had one teacher for each of the four core subjects: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. While the teachers were present in the classrooms, students completed the questionnaire. Based on the teachers remaining in the classrooms, students may have provided biased answers out of fear of repercussions. Additionally, younger students are more inclined to please their teachers, which may also have influenced students' responses.

The questionnaire can also be considered a limitation to the research study because it was based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Due to the limited selection choices, the variability of responses was very small. Students selected the 'neutral' answer choice very frequently. The researcher was uncertain if 'neutral' answer choice was selected because students did not have a strong opinion in one direction or the other. Some students may have selected 'neutral' more frequently because of the teachers' presence in the classroom.

The researcher believed the lack of diversity in the sample of participants may have been a factor in the lack of statistically significant relationships/differences found in several of the hypotheses. The majority of students who participated in the research study were fairly good students based on academic and discipline records. In fact, there was not a large variability among students' discipline referrals received because a large majority of students never received a discipline referral within the entire academic year. Additionally, there were relatively few students who earned a letter grade of an 'F.' Overall, many students were quite successful in the classroom. Based on prior research, students who excel in the classroom tend to have parents who are involved in their academics. In order for students to participate in this research study, they had to return a signed, parent/guardian active consent form. Therefore, it is highly likely that students who did not return the active consent form may be some of the same students who are not doing as well in the classroom and receiving a fair amount of discipline referrals. The researcher was especially interested in obtaining a research sample that included a

representative proportion of students who received failing grades and a greater number of discipline referrals.

Lastly, the researcher desired to obtain a larger sample size, especially among African American students. The number who was given permission by parents to do so was disappointingly low. Prior research suggests that this may be a product of a lack of parental involvement by some African American parents in their children's education; however, the scope of this study does not allow conclusive determinations regarding the degree to which this was a factor in the present study.

#### Policy Implications

This research study addressed relationships between students' beliefs and academic outcomes. Based on the low return of active parental consent forms by African American students, the researcher asserts there may be a lack of African American parental involvement. Prior research has demonstrated parental involvement is correlated to student achievement. African American students who participated in this research study appeared to have parents that were more involved with their academics based on their overall grade averages and low discipline referrals received.

School administrators and teachers could create an atmosphere in which all parents would feel welcome to visit their children's schools. In many cases, parents do not hear from their children's teachers or principals until something negative happens, which often causes a division between the school and home environment. This separation tends to place certain students at a great disadvantage due to the lack of parental involvement. As a result, it could possibly lead to apathy in the classroom, which can escalate into other critical issues.

Teachers could make a concerted effort to learn more about each student at the beginning of the academic year to help develop effective relationships. In the current study, the researcher found African American students who received a 'B' average or better had stronger negative beliefs toward their teachers compared to African American students who received a 'C' average or lower. To combat students' negative feelings, teachers could have students complete a questionnaire regarding what students enjoy doing on their free time. Additionally, teachers could reach out to parents by developing effective communication channels via a hand-written memo, telephone, and/or e-mail. Teachers could contact parents within the first several weeks of a new academic year to establish a friendly rapport. Relationship building could help students develop more positive beliefs about their teachers and lessen their negative beliefs.

Teachers could emphasize to African American students the importance of doing well in all of their subject areas. Based on this research study and prior research, African American students tend to lag behind Caucasian students. Additionally, African American students' self-beliefs and report grades demonstrated no statistically significant relationships. Teachers have a great responsibility to create a safe haven and a culture that promotes learning among all students regardless of gender and ethnicity. This could potentially help students to develop a stronger level of self-belief regarding their potential to excel in the classroom. African American students could also be challenged to learn more in the classroom and put forth more effort. This may require some teachers to attend workshops specifically designed to offer strategies in regards to working with students from diverse backgrounds and learning styles.

Regarding disciplining students, the process of administering disciplinary referrals and sanctions to students should be objective in nature. The researcher suggests administrators and teachers could analyze the significant difference between the number of disciplinary referrals administered to African American and Caucasian students. School personnel may gain an insight to understanding the genuine rationale that is the basis upon which they administer disciplinary referrals to students. Administrators and teachers may want to ensure that students understand their infractions and the reason they are being disciplined. This may help to alleviate some of the miscommunication between students and teachers, such as students believing that their teachers do not like them and give them poor grades. Additionally, the discipline sanction should fit the infraction. If it is possible, administrators and teachers may want to avoid disciplinary tactics that keep students from receiving invaluable classroom instructions (Black, 2004). Students who are barred from being in a classroom due to their wrongdoings may begin to believe that education is not as important and begin to lag behind their peers.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Unlike many prior research studies involving the academic achievement gap using a qualitative approach, this research study depended solely on a quantitative method to obtain data regarding students' self-beliefs and beliefs about their teachers and classroom experience. Based on the literature review, many researchers have primarily addressed the academic and discipline gaps from the teachers' perspectives. There should be more quantitative research studies focusing on African American students' opinions regarding their classroom experience. In order to obtain a broader perspective of the current issue,

African American students should be directly involved in research studies and comprise a larger sample size.

A mixed-method research approach could be advantageous in obtaining a greater amount of information regarding African American students' classroom experience. Students could be administered a questionnaire followed by a qualitative research component. These students could either be interviewed on an individual basis or participate in a panel discussion. The interviews should be designed as a follow-up to the questionnaire or for clarification purposes. Since a questionnaire is limited in nature, an interview could offer more insight regarding the academic and discipline gaps.

Future research study should also focus on developing a questionnaire to obtain teachers' beliefs regarding the academic and discipline gaps between African American and Caucasian students. Both teachers and African American students' responses could be analyzed to determine whether or not both parties share the same view. This information could also be vital in learning if teachers are having great difficulties relating to certain groups of students based on ethnicity or a diverse background.

Additionally, future researchers should consider obtaining a larger sample size that would increase the generalizability of the study. In the current study, it is difficult to generalize the study to other regions of the country since the sample was taken from a single region. Therefore, it may be of some benefit for researchers to determine specific regions where African American students are more likely to be successful in the classroom while receiving a small percentage of disciplinary referrals. To thoroughly address the academic achievement and discipline gaps, it would require the collective efforts of students, parents, parent-teacher organizations, community, businesses, school



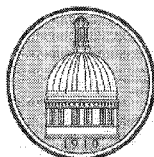
administrators, and teachers. The active participation of various stakeholders may help to increase the number of African American students who would participate in future research studies.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the descriptive and comparative findings of the research study. The researcher found similarities findings between both African American and Caucasian student due to the small differences between group means. Overall, African American students performed just as well as Caucasian students in the four core subjects without evidence of a significant academic achievement gap. Additionally, there was no evidence to support a discipline gap between African American and Caucasian students. The findings indicated there were statistically significant correlations between African American students' (1) self-beliefs and discipline referrals, and (2) positive beliefs about their teachers and discipline referrals. Furthermore, there were statistically significant correlations between Caucasian students' (1) negative beliefs toward teachers and composite report card grades, and (2) self-beliefs and discipline referrals. The researcher also discussed the limitations and recommendations for future research.

## APPENDIX A

## HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW PERMISSION



## THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147  
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
 Tel: 601.266.6820  
 Fax: 601.266.5509  
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE  
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
  - The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
  - The selection of subjects is equitable.
  - Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
  - Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
  - Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
  - Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
  - Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
  - If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
- Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 28051301

PROJECT TITLE: **African American Students' Beliefs of Teachers on Academic Outcomes, Disciplinary Referrals, and Referrals to Special Education Services**

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 05/01/08 to 04/30/09

PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **James M. Thompson**

COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**

DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**

FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **05/13/08 to 05/12/09**

*Lawrence A. Hosman*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.  
 HSPRC Chair

*5-19-08*  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## APPENDIX B

## LETTER TO SCHOOL DISTRICT

Date: April 14, 2008

Dr. Paul N. McKenzie  
Director of Research and Development  
Lancaster County School District  
300 South Catawba Street  
Lancaster, South Carolina 29720

Dear Dr. McKenzie:

As you are aware, I am currently pursuing my PhD in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. My research study explores correlations between students' beliefs and academic outcomes, such as composite report card grades, and disciplinary referrals. I am seeking permission from Lancaster County School District to conduct a quantitative research on current fifth grade students. I want to study these students through a survey instrument developed specifically for this study. The survey instrument is comprised of questions regarding students' beliefs about their school environment, classroom environment, and discipline behavior.

Students' beliefs regarding their education experience is an important factor that determines school success. As a researcher and educator, it is my aim to identify effective strategies that may help all students in Lancaster County School District excel in the classroom. Therefore, I am seeking your permission to access both district-level (discipline referrals and referrals to special education services) and student-level data (composite report card grades).

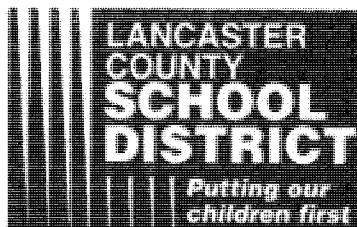
If your district is willing to participate, please submit a typed letter on your district's letterhead granting me permission to conduct this research study. I look forward to conducting research in Lancaster County School District. If you should have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at your earliest convenience. As always, I would like to sincerely thank you for demonstrating support towards my academic career goals.

Regards,

James M. Thompson, Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
College of Education and Psychology  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research  
118 College Drive #5027  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

## APPENDIX C

## PERMISSION LETTER FROM SCHOOL DISTRICT



April 20, 2008

James M. Thompson  
Doctoral Candidate  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
College of Education and Psychology  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research  
118 College Drive #5027  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Dear Mr. Thompson:

I understand that you are currently pursuing a PhD in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. Your research topic, which explores correlations between students' beliefs and academic outcomes is especially noteworthy and will make a contribution to the professional literature related to the topic.

Furthermore, I understand that your plans include a quantitative research methodology to focus on current fifth grade students, using a survey developed specifically for this study, and comprised of questions regarding students' beliefs of their school environment, classroom environment, and discipline behavior.

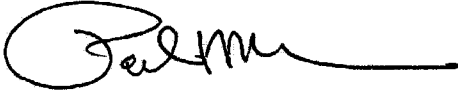
As you know, this topic is consonant with current data collection priorities in our district and of high interest to teachers and administrators in Lancaster County. As such, please accept this letter in support of your proposal and as evidence of our willingness to assist. Specially, we commit to provide:

- District-level data related discipline referrals and referrals to special education services.
- Student achievement data (report card grades, test scores) and other associated data (attendance).
- Permission to survey target students using the aforementioned instrument.

Finally, to ensure confidentiality protection, all data will be coded anonymous, with individual identifiers stripped. We will be able to code each survey you provide to match the specific student record, so data can statistical analysis can include both survey and archival datasets.

As you make plans to proceed, please contact the Office of Research and Development so that we can assist with scheduling and set up the anonymous data tracking system. Once again, good luck in your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul N. McKenzie", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Paul N. McKenzie  
Director of Research and Development

## APPENDIX D

## COVER LETTER TO RESEARCH STUDY SUBJECTS' PARENT/GUARDIAN

Date: (Month) (Day), (Year)

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is James M. Thompson. I have served as an educator with Lancaster County School District as a seventh grade science teacher at South Middle from 2002-2005 prior to becoming the GEAR UP Project Coordinator in 2006. Currently, I am working on my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting a study to explore correlations between current fifth grade students' beliefs and academic outcomes.

Dr. McKenzie, Director of Research and Development of Lancaster County School District, has granted permission for me to conduct this research study. In order for your child to participate in this study, he or she should return the form with your signature. Your confidentiality and that of your child is guaranteed. Students' beliefs regarding their education experience is an important factor that determines school success. As a researcher, it is my aim to identify effective strategies that may help all students in Lancaster County School District excel in the classroom. Your child's participation is voluntary and should take no more than 15 minutes. Responses will be kept confidential. I would like to thank you in advance for your assistance in this research study.

Regards,

James M. Thompson, Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research

**Participant Permission:** I have carefully read the above information in this consent form. I am granting my child \_\_\_\_\_ permission to participate in this research study, which involves completing a student's beliefs survey instrument.

_____/_____/_____ Parent Name (PRINT)	_____ Parent Signature	_____ Date
_____ Investigator Signature	_____/_____/_____ Date	

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi – Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research studies involving human participants follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns regarding subjects' rights as research participants should be directed to the

Chair of the Institutional Review Board  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
118 College Drive #5147  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
(601) 266-6820

## APPENDIX E

### PARENT/GUARDIAN RESEARCH SUMMARY

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a relationship between students' beliefs and academic outcomes.

**Investigator:** James M. Thompson is conducting this research study, under the supervision of Dr. Mike Ward, Professor of Educational Leadership and Research.

**Description of Study:** Upon approval from The University of Southern Mississippi's Institutional Review Board, a researcher will distribute a student's beliefs survey instrument and collect archival data on fifth grade students in Lancaster County School District.

For the purpose of this study, only fifth grade students are eligible to participate on a voluntary basis. Students should return an active permission form signed by a parent/guardian. Additionally, students should sign and return the assent form prior to participating in the research study. Additionally, the researcher will obtain students' 2007-2008 composite report card grades. The researcher will request the assistance of the Office of Research and Development to remove all subjects' identifiers from archival data in order to maintain the anonymity of each subject. The researcher will not receive any data with students' identifiers, such as birth name, identification number, etc. The researcher will also include students' ethnicity and gender. It is the intent of the researcher not to exclude any student based on demographics, such as ethnicity or gender.

**Benefits:** The potential benefits derived from this study may help teachers and school administrators to become more aware of specific issues facing students in rural public schools. Additionally, the findings would help to improve communication channels and understanding between students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

**Risks:** The possible risk to the subjects is considered minimal. Subjects will be informed that participation is strictly voluntary. There are some conditions under which subjects will be terminated from the study before its completion are when (1) subjects experience discomfort from taking the survey instrument, (2) subjects express not wanting to complete the survey instrument, and/or (3) subjects are demonstrating disruptive behaviors.

**Volunteer Statement:** Your child is participating in this research study as a volunteer. The decision for your child to participate is solely based on your discretion. If you grant your child permission to participate in the research study, he or she is allowed to stop at any point prior or during the research study. Your child will not be treated any differently for not wanting to complete the research study.

**Confidentiality:** Confidentiality will be held with the highest regard to maintain subjects' anonymity. Subjects participating in this research study are strictly voluntary, and subjects may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information will be excluded from archival data to maintain subjects' confidentiality.

**Participant's Assurance:** No information from any subject will be reported at any time during or after the research study. Furthermore, the results of the study will only report summary data. The researcher will continue to maintain subjects' anonymity throughout any written documentation. Subjects will be able to withdraw from this research study at anytime without any repercussions or questions ask. Any questions or comments regarding this research study should be directed to James M. Thompson at (803) 466-4006.

## APPENDIX F

## STUDENTS' SURVEY

The following survey asks you to report your beliefs or feelings about your school, classroom, and behavior. Please read each question carefully and fill in the circle that best describes your answer. No one will see your responses. This is not a test; there is no right or wrong answers, only your opinion, which is important.

## MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Use a No. 2 pencil only.
- Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens.
- Make solid marks that fill the response completely.
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.
- Make no stray marks on this form.

## ID NUMBER

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
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<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

As a student, I...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Enjoy going to school and learning new things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get along with all of my teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not understand my teachers and they do not understand me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am comfortable asking my teachers for help with my homework.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Like all of my teachers and feel as if I can talk to them about anything.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel that students pick at other students for making good grades.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Really care about what my friends think of me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allow my friends to tell me what to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience a lot of peer pressure from my friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study and earn good grades because it is important to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not learn anything in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am in the right classes that challenge me to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



<b>As a student, I...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Am in classes with other students that have the same ability level.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am in the "smart" class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Should be in gifted and talented classes so I can learn more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Want to go into easier classes because the work is too difficult.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am not being challenged to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am in a class with other students who are not smart.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Belong in a higher class because I am smart.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Like doing work with other students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Like when my teachers give me group work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not like to participate in class assignments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Raise my hand in class and ask my teachers questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sit at the back of the class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

The following questions are about your feelings towards your teachers. Please respond with your honest opinion by placing a check in the appropriate box.

<b>My teachers.....</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Respect and care about me as an individual.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take the time to get to know their students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always correcting me when I speak incorrectly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes me feel like I belong there.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treat all students fair.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage African American students to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not teach me anything.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Give me a lot of homework.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage African American students to be in gifted and talented classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are willing to help me learn by coming early to school or staying after school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Just give me a grade to pass me to the next grade.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Challenge me to do well in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Set high expectations and want me to do well in their classes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believe that I smart and can learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talk down to me as if I am not smart.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Embarrass me in front of other students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Think I am not smart enough to be in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### DISCIPLINE BEHAVIOR

As a student, I...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Am always getting into trouble at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not get into any trouble at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel bad when I do get into trouble at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel my teachers unfairly gave me discipline referral(s) for no good reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel I do not deserve to receive the disciplinary action(s).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel my teachers are always calling on me or accusing me for something that I did not do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel that me teachers treat all students fairly when it comes to disciplinary actions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel that my teachers are too hard on me when it comes to receiving a disciplinary action.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel my teachers give more disciplinary actions to African American students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel that my teachers are giving me a lot of disciplinary actions because they do not like me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believe that some teachers would rather 'write a student up' so that student can be expelled from school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX G

## RESEARCH SUBJECT ASSENT FORM

My name is James M. Thompson. I am a student at The University of Southern Mississippi. I want to learn about fifth graders' feelings towards school. I have several staff members from the district office who are helping me with this research project.

If you agree to participate, we will give you a form with questions. The questions are about your feelings about school. No one else will see your answers. There is not a right or wrong answer. You should only write one answer choice for each question.

We do not feel that these questions will make you uncomfortable. If it does make you uncomfortable, stop answering the questions. At anytime, you are allowed to skip any question. You will not be in trouble and nobody would be mad at you.

Your parent/guardian has given permission for you to participate in this research project. But, it is up to you if you would like to participate. You will not be in trouble if you decide not to participate.

Please do not put your name on the form with questions. Take your time to decide whether or not you would like to participate. Choose one of the choices below by placing a mark in the blank.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I do want to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Write your name here (PRINT)

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Individual Explaining the Research Study

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Date

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